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Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe

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"HERE IS A MAN WHOSE NAME IS ŠEMAH"  
(ZECHARIAH 6:12)\*

Oded Lipschits

*Introduction*

During the 2008 excavation season at Ramat Raḥel (July–August 2008), a very small, heretofore unknown, type of private stamp impression on a jar handle was discovered. The find itself came as no surprise: to date, over 600 stamp impressions on jar handles from the Late Iron Age and the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods have been unearthed at Ramat Raḥel, making it one of the richest sites in Judah.

Stamped handles discovered at the site include a variety of known types from the late eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. (such as the *lmk* and rosette stamp impressions, as well as the so-called private or official<sup>1</sup> stamp impressions), types from the Persian period (such as the different kinds of *yehud* and lion stamp impressions), and types from the early Hellenistic period (such as the late *yehud* and the *yršlm* stamp impressions). Reading the very small stamp impression we found in 2008 was not easy, and after we deciphered it, I was surprised to find that it bore *šemah* as a private name.

In this essay—which I dedicate to Lester L. Grabbe, a good friend and a great scholar, whose imprint on the research of our field has been enormous—I would like to present this stamp impression, and to discuss my understanding of how the personal name *šemah* developed into a messianic title.

\* I would like to thank Professors Nadav Na'aman, Benjamin Sass, David S. Vanderhooft, and Ran Zadok for their comments and assistance concerning the interpretation and understanding of this stamp impression. I would also like to thank Ido Koch for his assistance in collecting the different bibliographical items, as well as for his aid at different stages of the writing of this study. My thanks to Pavel Shrago and Rodica Penchas, both of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, who, respectively, photographed and prepared the drawings of the handle and stamp impression.

1. On "private" and "official" stamp impression, see Vaughn 1999, 110–17.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

### The Stamped Handle

The renewed excavations at Ramat Raḥel began in 2004, and we have now completed six seasons of active digging (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).<sup>2</sup> The stamp impression on the jar handle was discovered in a level of white crushed limestone that comprises the floor of the courtyard.<sup>3</sup> This floor is part of the second phase of the edifice, dated not earlier than the late seventh century B.C.E. (Lipschits et al. 2009).

A pit with pottery from the end of the seventh or the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E. was found in the same square, sealed by the level of white crushed limestone. Even if this pit is not directly below the floor where the stamped handle under discussion was discovered, it should be understood as being later than the pit. Since the stamped handle probably dates to the late eighth century B.C.E. (Lipschits, Sergi, and Koch 2010, 22–27)—it is classic *lmk* type pottery, which is now safely dated to the late eighth to early seventh centuries (Ussishkin 2004; Zimhoni 2004)—we may conclude that it was discovered out of its original context.

The stamp was impressed on a large storage jar handle (ca. 35 wide × 16 mm thick) equidistant between the two ridges along the handle. The pottery is pinkish-brown with grey core and many small and some large white inclusions.

### Characteristics of the Stamp Impression

The impression is on the upper part of the handle, with the top of the seal facing the left side of the handle. The seal that made the impression was oval, and the impression is deeper on the left, upper and lower right sides, where the bezel of the seal can clearly be seen. The upper right side of the impression is much shallower, and the bezel, as well as the upper part of the *lamed*, are barely visible. The seal itself may have been slightly concave, which would account for the impression being poorly impressed at the centre and the letters, as well as the single field divider in this part, being shallow and faint.

2. The excavation project is directed by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, under the auspices of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, and the Theological Seminary (Wissenschaftlich-Theologisches Seminar) and the Faculty for Jewish Studies (Hochschule für jüdische Studien) at Heidelberg University. The staff of the excavations includes Yurval Gudot (field director), Benni Arubas (Architecture), and Liora Freud (Registration). For first summaries of the excavations, see Lipschits et al. 2006a, 2006b, 2010.

3. Area D-6, Square D146, Locus 14012, Registration Number 7125/1.

The preserved dimensions of the stamp impression are 9 mm high and 10 mm thick. There are two inscribed registers with a single field divider between them and a single border line around the entire circumference (where the bezel impression remains). There are four letters in the upper register and five in the lower register; not all of them are complete, but all are legible. The quality of the seal was poor; some letters were not formed in the standard manner, but they are consistent and well organized in terms of space and size.

The four letters in the upper inscribed register are: *lamed*, *tsade*, *mem*; and *het* (חֶט־ל, *lsmḥ*). Only the upper part of the *lamed* is slightly damaged, but it is entirely legible. The five letters in the lower inscribed register are: *aleph*, *lamed*, *shin*, *mem*, and *ayin* (אֵל־ל־שִׁן־מֵם־עַיִן, *'lsm'*). The first and last letters in both registers touch the border of the stamp impression: the *lamed* on the upper part, the *het* on the upper left side, the *aleph* in two places—the lower part of the vertical downstroke and the right side of the lower oblique strokes, and the lower left side of the *ayin*. The tops of four of the letters of the lower inscribed register touch the single field divider (only the upper part of the *ayin* is a bit lower).

The *mem* in both the upper and lower registers is not standard; its top is formed with a stroke at the far left that is detached from the letter itself. Examples of a similar *mem* appear in two identical stamp impressions, usually read as יְהוֹנָתָן / מְנַחֵם; one was excavated at Bet Shemesh (Grant and Wright 1939, 81–82, no. 1263) and the other one at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1956, 145, no. 5103).<sup>4</sup>

The *tsade* seems to be inscribed in reverse. A similar phenomenon was observed in other cases (see, e.g., Avigad and Sass 1997, 251, no. 682 [very different from no. 681]; 256, no. 694 and 695). It may be that in all these cases the *tsade* is an indication of the same (poor quality) craftsmanship, wherein the engraver inscribed one letter, and always the same one, in reverse.

In the lower inscribed register, the *aleph*, which is not standard, is characterized by a long vertical downstroke that reaches the border of the impression. This unusual type of *aleph* is known as late as the late

4. On this stamp impression, cf. Avigad and Sass 1997, 249, no. 677; Barkay 1985, 414, no. 10; Vaughn 1999, 203, nos. 56–57. It is interesting to note that in two other types of stamp impressions on jar handles with the same name, one with two exemplars discovered in Jerusalem and Tel Goded (Avigad and Barkay 2000, 249–50; Bliss 1900, 220–21, no. 6, Pl. 7, 6; Bliss and Macalister 1902, 120, no. 24, Pl. 56, 24), and the other one with eight exemplars discovered in Lachish (4), Gibeon, Ramat Raḥel, Khirbet 'Abbad and Adulam (Diringer 1953, 341; Pritchard 1959, 28, Fig. 19, 7, Pl. 11, 7; Vaughn 1999, 204, nos. 60, 62), the *mem* is of the more common type.

seventh or early sixth century B.C.E. (see, e.g., Shoham 2000a, 46, bulla 34). The very high oblique strokes of the *aleph* meet well to the left of the downstroke, reaching over the *lamed*, similar to another stamp impression excavated at Ramat Raḥel where the same name *ʾlsmʿ* (אֵלְשָׁמַע) appears as well (and see below). Therefore, the stamp impression should be read: *lsmh / ʾlsmʿ* (לְשִׁמְהָ / אֵלְשָׁמַע), and should be interpreted as (belonging to) Šemaḥ (son of) ʾElišamaʿ.

#### The Date of the Stamp Impressions

The script is characteristic of the late eighth to mid-seventh centuries B.C.E., with many parallels in the seal script that is usually dated until the seventh and early sixth centuries. It is difficult to assign a narrower date based on paleography, but the time frame of the “private” stamped jar handles as a phenomenon, and the current jar handle as part of it, can be limited archaeologically to the very late eighth century. From 43 types<sup>5</sup> of “private” stamp impressions on jar handles known to us, 35 types were clearly discovered in destruction levels well dated to 701 B.C.E., and can be dated with high probability to the late eighth century (Lipschits, Sergi, and Koch 2010, 22–27). The remaining eight types were discovered only at sites located in the hill country which continued to exist after 701 B.C.E. with no destruction level. However, five of these eight types containing names (both personal and patronymic) also appear on stamp impressions discovered at Lachish Level III. This may mean that the same person had two different seals that were in use in different geographical locations—but in any case we should date both to the same pre-Sennacherib period.

Only three types of stamp impressions on jar handles (*hwšʿm / hgy*, *hšy / ʾlsmʿ*, and the stamp impression discussed here, *lsmh / ʾlsmʿ*) with no parallel from Lachish or another site in the Judean Shephelah have been discovered in Jerusalem or at Ramat Raḥel. Yet, since they are only three out of 43 types, we may assume that they should also be dated to the late eighth century B.C.E., and that they survived to be discovered at sites that were not destroyed during the Assyrian campaign in 701 B.C.E. No “private” stamp impressions on jar handles have been discovered in a clear seventh-century archaeological context, and it seems that this

5. The term “type” in relation to stamp impression is used here in order to indicate a specific seal. There can be two or even three types (= seals) bearing the same name, where different indications (e.g. size of the stamp impression, the orientation of the letters, and other characteristics) clearly demonstrate that different seals were used.

phenomenon should be limited to the late eighth century (Lipschits, Sergi, and Koch 2010, 22–27).

We may conclude, then, that at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. a man with the name Šemaḥ (son of) ʾElišamaʿ held an administrative position in Judah.

#### The Name ʾēlišāmāʿ

The name *ʾēlišāmāʿ* (“God has heard”; cf. Zadok 1988, 23) is well known in both biblical and epigraphic Hebrew texts. In the Bible it occurs 17 times, mainly in post-exilic texts. It is mentioned five times as the name of the chief of Ephraim in the days of Moses (Num 1:10; 2:18; 7:48, 53; 10:22); as a priest in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:8); as one of the offspring of the daughter of Sheshan (1 Chr 2:41); as one of the sons of David (2 Sam 5:16; 1 Chr 3:6, 8; 14:6); as a scribe in the days of Jehoiakim (Jer 36:12, 20, 21); and as the grandfather of Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah (2 Kgs 25:25; Jer 41:1). In this last case, we can note a unique papponymic phenomenon where the two components of the name were inverted: from *ʾēlišāmāʿ* (אֵלְשָׁמַע) to *ʾlsmʿ* (אֵלְשָׁמַע).

The name appears on a stamp impression on jar handle discovered in the City of David, reading: *[ע]לְשָׁמַע / ʾלְשָׁמַע* (*hšy / ʾlsmʿ*) = Hushai (son of) ʾElishama[ʿ] (Shoham 2000b, 82, no. 2). The name appears in the lower inscribed register of a stamp impression on jar handle discovered at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1962, 18–19, Fig. 14, 4; Pl. 6.1, and cf. Vaughn 1999, 202, no. 39). The paleography of this stamp impression is very similar to the new stamp impression from Ramat Raḥel, but the shape of the impression and its size indicate a different seal.<sup>7</sup> The name appears also on bullae from the City of David (Shoham 2000a, 36, 40, 43, 46–47; cf. Avigad and Sass 1997: nos. 447, 588 with an alternative reading), and on numerous unprovenanced seals and bullae located in private collections.

#### Šemaḥ as a Personal Name

The meaning of *šemaḥ* (שֵׁמַח) is “branch” or “scion.” In epigraphic Hebrew it appears as a personal name only in the stamp impression

6. On the papponymic principle among the ruling families in Judea and Samaria in the Persian period, see Cross 1983, 89–91.

7. A renewed examination of Aharoni’s stamp impression has yet to be made, and the above conclusion is based on his report as well as on the excavation’s original registrations and photos.

discussed above and once more in Arad inscription number 49 (Aharoni 1981, 80–82, and cf. Ahituv 1992, 91; Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005, 77–80; Na'aman 2008, 195–96, and n. 81). This inscription was deciphered after combining several fragments of a bowl. There was an inscription inside the bowl (now illegible) and around the outside, probably around the entire circumference, with lines separating various sections of the inscription. It seems, after Aharoni, that the lines on the outside of these bowls were written while the still intact bowls faced downwards. In Aharoni's section 4, line 11, he read  $[b]n.šmḥ$  ([so]n of šemah, 1). From the photo and drawing (Aharoni 1981, 80) it seems that the reading of the name is well established, while the reading of the *nm* in the first word, before the separating dot, is only a reconstruction, as is the word  $[b]n$  ([so]n) (Na'aman 2008, 195–96, and n. 81).

Aharoni interpreted the name *šemah* as a personal name, just as in all the other 15 lines of the inscription on the bowl, where there is either a private name or a name following "son of" (𐤑𐤍) or "sons of" (𐤑𐤍𐤁). Dobbs-Allsopp et al. (2005, 79, 617), however, interpreted *šemah* as a hypocoristic ("scion"), probably abbreviated from *šmḥ-DN* or the like. They also claimed that in the Hebrew Bible (Zech 3:6, 8, 12; Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15, and see below) *šemah* occurs only as a messianic title, but already Zadok (1988, 77, 282) claimed that its appearance in the Arad ostraca as well as the Neo-Assyrian toponym *ša-ma-ḥi*, *ša-ma-ḥa-a* referring to an important settlement in the eastern Jezirah (Zadok 1982, 171, with further literature) proves that the name was not merely symbolic. To this we may add the name of the Jewish village Kēfar Šemah in the territory of Hippus during the second and third centuries C.E.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Šemah between Personal Name and Eschatological Title*

The root *š-m-ḥ* appears in the Hebrew Bible 33 times as a verb (mainly in the Qal and Hiphil—15 and 14 times respectively—but also four times in the Piel). Usually the verb is connected to the growth of plants (see, e.g., Gen 2:5, 9; 3:18; 41:6, 23; Exod 10:5; Deut 29:22; Isa 61:11; Ps 104:14), but also to the growth of hair (Lev 13:27; Judg 16:22; 2 Sam 10:5 [= 1 Chr 19:5]; Ezek 16:7). In one case the verb was used to symbolize the healing of the skin (Isa 58:8), in another as a metaphor for the birth (or rebirth) of a child (Job 9:19, and cf. Ben Sira 14:18), and in still another as a metaphor for the birth (or rebirth) of the nation (Isa 44:4).

8. See Avi-Yonah 1976, 73; Reeg 1989, 368, with further literature. See there also on the location of Kefar Semah in the southern part of the Sea of Galilee.

In this symbolic way, too, we find "Truth shall spring out of the earth" (Ps 85:12), "salvation spring up" (Isa 45:8), and, in contrast, "trouble will not sprout from the ground" (Job 5:6). In two cases the verb in the Hiphil was connected to 𐤍𐤑 ("horn"). In Ps 132:17 it seems that the horn is a symbol for the growing power and eternity of the king, while in Ezek 29:21 it symbolizes the growing power (and eternity?) of Israel.

The substantive *šemah* appeared in the Hebrew Bible 12 times, usually in reference to plants, or even in a wider reference to anything that sprouts from and grows on the land (and cf. Gen 19:25; Isa 61:11; Ezek 16:7; Hos 8:7; Ps 65:11 [10]). In Jer 23:5; 33:15–16 and in Zech 3:8; 6:12–13 (and cf. also Isa 4:2) *šemah* became a messianic title, probably as part of a textual and ideological process between the texts.

According to Jer 23:5, the Lord will raise up to David *šemah šaddiq* (a righteous branch," or perhaps, after Swetnam (1965, 29–40), and parallel to Ugaritic texts and a fourth- or third-century B.C.E. Phoenician inscription from Lapethos and Idalion in Cyprus: "legitimate scion"), "who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land."<sup>9</sup> According to v. 6, his name will be *yhwš šdqēnū* (*yhwš* is our righteousness), with a clear allusion to King Zedekiah by a deliberate reversal of the meaning of his name.<sup>10</sup> In 33:15–16 this oracle is reinterpreted and the name *yhwš šdqemū* is transferred to Jerusalem (Thompson 1980, 601).<sup>11</sup> It seems that *šemah šaddiq* is the pledge of the nomination of a scion from the Davidic dynasty, and the best parallel for it is *weyaša ḥoter miggeza' yišāy* ("A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse," Isa 11:1) (Bright 1965, 143). The *šemah* connects to the image of the dynasty as a tree (cf. to Ezek 17:3), and *šemah šaddiq* is the legal heir—the one who rightly sits on the throne (Hoffman 2001, 471). We can conclude that the *šemah šaddiq* in Jeremiah was a title that developed as a promise

9. On the similar expression *šemah šaddiq* in the Phoenician text, see Honeyman 1941; Donner and Röllig 1968, no. 43, 1, 11; Cross 1994, 98–99. These inscriptions can be compared with another Phoenician inscription from Sidon, dated to the fifth century B.C.E. (Donner and Röllig 1968, 16), where the expression *bn šdq* was used in connection with the legitimate heir of the dynasty (cf. Meyers and Meyers 1987, 202).

10. On the question of whether or not these two verses are genuine utterances of the prophet, see the review by Lundbom 2004, 170–71, with further literature.

11. Verses 14–16 (within the unit of the four oracles invoking the name of David, vv. 14–26) are missing from the LXX and are usually interpreted by scholars as a late post-exilic addition. See Lust 1994, and, in addition, Ferry 1998; Lundbom 2004, 537. However, the see opposing view of Lundbom 2004, 537–39.

to the future, when the legal heir of Zedekiah—the last king of the Davidic dynasty—will sit on the throne.<sup>12</sup>

The same word was used in Zech 3:8, in a clear connection to Jer 23:5: “I am going to bring my servant, the branch” (בְּיָמַי מְבִיא אֶת־עֵצֶבֶד) (צֶמַח). The future Davidic king is the subject of this promise, and he is the *šēmaḥ* that “will come up from the stump of Jesse.”

It is not clear here if *šēmaḥ* is a personal name, a symbolic name, or a title. Contrary to Mitchell (1912, 186–87), Noth (1966, 10), Ohana and Heltzer (1978, 140), Meyers and Meyers (1987, 37), and others, who interpret *šēmaḥ* as a symbolic name, Zadok (1988, 77) claimed that *šēmaḥ* should be interpreted as a personal and not merely a symbolic name. Lemaire (1977, 210; 1996, after the suggestions of others; see, e.g., Mowinckel 1959, 120, 160) was even more explicit in his statement that both in Zech 3 and 6 *šēmaḥ* is a personal name, the Hebrew name of Zerubbabel (but see, however, the claims raised by Rose 2000, 140–41; 2003; Curtis 2006, 144–48, and see below).

Contrary to these suggestions, however, referring to one or two eighth-century B.C.E. epigraphic finds (see above) in order to interpret a biblical text which is late by at least 200 years, is, in my opinion, problematic from the methodological point of view. It would be preferable to assume that there was a textual process that began with the prophecy of Jeremiah (23:5) with its promise of a scion from the Davidic dynasty as *šēmaḥ šaddīq* (in continuation to the *weyaša hoter miggeza' yisāy* in Isa 11:1). It was understood as a title for the future king, when the legal heir of Zedekiah—the last king of the Davidic line—would sit on the throne. This very important prophecy set the base for its use as a name for the future Davidic king in Zech 3:8, ‘*abdī šēmaḥ*. The use of the term *šēmaḥ* applied to the royal heir, in parallel with the identical use of the word in fourth- to third-century Phoenician inscriptions discovered in Cyprus, makes it clear that we are dealing with a *terminus technicus* (Cross 1994, 98).

This title was further developed in Zech 6:12, when it was clearly stated that *šēmaḥ* is a personal name: “Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD.” The statement הִנֵּה אִישׁ צֶמַח שָׁמַח connects to 3:8 and to Jer 23:5 (and also to 33:15; cf. Mitchell 1912, 186, and 17, 33, and cf. Meyers and Meyers 1987, 371), and was probably connected with the Davidic aspirations of the future royal figure (Rose 2000, 140–41; 2003;

12. Mowinckel (1959, 15–20) assigns these verses, as well as Amos 9: 11, and Mic 5:1 (2) to the post-exilic period, and claims they were dependent on Zech 3:8 and 6:12. See the opposing view of Lundbom 2004, 172.

Curtis 2006, 136), even if in the final, very corrupted and problematic text of Zech 6:9–14, and especially following v. 11, it can be understood as directed towards the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak (Mitchell 1912, 185–86; Meyers and Meyers 1987, 371–72; Blenkinsopp 1988, 238; Redditt 1995, 42, but see, however, the claims of Ackroyd 1968, 196; Petersen 1984, 279–80; Curtis 2006, 144–45).<sup>13</sup>

### Summary

The name *ʿēlišāmaʿ* was well known during the pre- and post-exilic periods. The name *šēmaḥ* was a personal name at the end of the eighth century B.C.E., as attested in the inscription on the bowl from Arad and in the stamp impression on the jar handle published in the present study. There is no mention of this name in any biblical text dated to the First Temple period, and it seems that the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer 23:5), with its promise of a scion from the Davidic dynasty, with the title *šēmaḥ šaddīq* (in continuation to the *hoter miggeza' yisāy* in Isa 11:1) as a title that developed as a pledge to the future, when the legal heir of Zedekiah—the last king of the Davidic dynasty—will sit on the throne, set the base for its use as ‘*abdī šēmaḥ* in Zech 3:8, as a title for the future Davidic king. This title was further developed in Zech 6:12, when it was stated that *šēmaḥ* is a personal name, but with clear connection to the Davidic aspirations. Afterward, in late second temple Judaism, this title was further developed as a clear Messianic title—and a straight line was crossed from the various texts in Qumran to the setting of the daily ‘Amidah (“Shmoneh Esreh”) prayer.

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13. See Albertz’s claims (2003, 326 n. 19) against Lemaire’s reconstructions (1996, 48–57), based on his interpretation for these verses.

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## DROUGHT, HUNGER, AND REDISTRIBUTION: A SOCIAL ECONOMIC READING OF NEHEMIAH 5

Bob Becking

### *Drought as Perennial Problem*

Humankind has suffered from periods of drought throughout known history. Drought is caused by a decrease of rainfall in a certain area, which itself is caused by fluctuations in climate and weather. An extended period of below-average precipitation can lead to an agricultural drought that seriously affects the crop production of the region under consideration. This, in turn, can threaten the continuity of the community living in that area (see the essays in Glanz, ed., 1987). From the point of view of history and history writing, it is therefore important to see how people react to such a life-threatening event. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries C.E., droughts in India affected the history of the sub-continent. When food prices rose, the rural population suffered a reduced food intake that resulted in a higher death rate and low vitality. People were forced into debt. Due to the interventions of the British administration—who organized food distribution and other forms of help—the drought did not turn into a disaster (Mooley and Pant 1981). These measures were based in noble and humanitarian ideas such as, for example, the need for continuity and the alleviation of poverty, but might also have been steered by imperial interests in the local economy and its fruits for Britain.

More recently, in the Brazilian Amazon, farmers had to cope with changing weather events related to El Niño. The poorest farmers experienced such droughts as a serious threat to their livelihood. Their vulnerability was heightened during these extreme climatic events. They would have benefited from increased availability of better weather forecasting for their own locality and the effects based on their current farming strategies (Mooley and Pant 1981).

In ancient Israel droughts occurred periodically. The Hebrew Bible narrates several stories with drought and famine as the theme (e.g. Gen 12; Ruth 1). During the post-exilic period droughts are suggested by