

SEVENTEEN NEWLY-EXCAVATED
YEHUD STAMP IMPRESSIONS
FROM RAMAT RAḤEL

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Abstract

This paper presents 17 Yehud stamp impressions unearthed at Ramat Raḥel during the 2005 and 2006 excavation seasons. They are a small addition to the 240 stamp impressions already found at the site, but contribute to the growing recognition of the importance of the site during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods.

In 2004, a geophysical survey and preliminary excavations were conducted at Ramat Raḥel. The first season of the renewed excavations ran from July to August, 2005.¹ In May, 2006, as part of the preparations for setting up a garden and a memorial area for five people shot to death at the site in 1956, we conducted excavations at the entrance to the site.² At that time we also moved about 1200 cubic metres of soil from Aharoni's dump at the southwestern side of the site in preparation for the 2006 excavation season.³

¹ Licenses G-19/2004; G-17/2005. The expedition was directed by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming under the auspices of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, the Theological Seminary (Wissenschaftlich-Theologisches Seminar) and the faculty for Jewish Studies (Hochschule für jüdische Studien) at Heidelberg University. One hundred and eighty volunteers participated in the three-week program, 20 of whom were students from Heidelberg University. Others came from the USA, Canada, Germany, England, France, Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland and Israel. The excavation team also included Yuval Gadot (field director), Benjamin Arubas (stratigraphical analysis and surveying), Gilad Cinamon (assistant field director), Liora Freud (registration), Dena Davis (assistance in the registration), Nirit Shimon, Veronica Zlatkovski, Lior Marom, Guy Margalit, Boris Babaiev and Shahaf Zach (area supervisors), Amitai Achiman (Administration), Omer Sergey (team coordinator), Peter van der Veen (academic program), Yoav Farhi (coins), Itamar Taxel (pottery analysis) and Pavel Shrago (photography). For a preliminary summary of this season see Lipschits, Oeming, Gadot, Arubas and Cinamon 2006.

² On the 1956 shooting event in Ramat Raḥel, see Lipschits 2006: 26–28.

³ The excavations were conducted by the Tel Aviv University team, directed by Oded Lipschits and Yuval Gadot. The field director was Gilad Cinamon. The excavation team also included Benjamin Arubas (stratigraphical analysis and surveying), Nirit Shimon, Veronica Zlatkovski, Lior Marom, Boris Babaiev, Shahaf Zach, Amitai Achiman and Omer Sergey (assistants) and Pavel Shrago (photography).

The second season of the renewed excavations ran from July to August of 2006.⁴

Ramat Rahel is one of the richest sites for stamp impressions from the late Iron Age and Persian and Hellenistic periods. It therefore came as no surprise that we unearthed many stamp impressions during the first two years of the renewed excavations. These include: 13 *lmlk* stamp impressions (one of them with concentric circles); 6 stamp impressions with concentric circles; one Iron Age ‘private’ stamp impression reading *ʾhzyh/wtnhm* (‘*Ahazyahu* [the son of] *Tanhum*’); 10 lion stamp impressions, five *yršlm* stamp impressions; one stamp impression in Arabic script; 13 broken or (as yet) unrecognizable stamp impressions and 17 Yehud stamp impressions.

All the stamp impressions will be fully published in the final excavation report. In this paper we present the new Yehud stamp impressions; they will also appear in a forthcoming comprehensive corpus of Yehud stamp impressions (Lipschits and Vanderhoof forthcoming).

Stamp Impression Number 1: [y]hwd / hnnh



This stamp impression (3094) was discovered during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 317 (Area C1), an intentional earth fill covering architectural remains dating to the Iron Age II and Persian and Early Hellenistic periods. The oval impression (18.3 mm high) was stamped on a body sherd (4 mm thick). The stamp impression is very deep on its bottom left and less clear on its upper side. The pottery is light pink-orange and is well fired with white inclusions. The sherd is broken diagonally on its right side, so the first and part of the second signs of the upper line are missing and part of the first sign of the second line is also missing. The stamp impression contains two lines with a single line field-divider between them. The script is lapidary Aramaic with distinctively archaic elements, most notably the virtually closed, triangular head of the *dalet*. The *he* leans to the left with an oblique upper stroke characteristic of the classic lapidary of the 6th and 5th centuries (Naveh 1970: 54).

Five stamp impressions of this type are known—an additional two from Ramat

⁴ License G-149/2006. The four-week season was directed by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, with Yuval Gadot (field director), Benjamin Arubas (stratigraphical analysis and surveying), Gilad Cinamon (assistant field director), Liora Freud (registration), Nirit Shimon, Veronica Zlatkovski, Lior Marom, and Shahaf Zach (area supervisors), Boris Babaiev, Omer Sergey, Shani Robin and Patricia Grandieri (assistant area supervisors) Amitai Achiman and Carsten Kettering (Administration), Omer Sergey (team coordinator and assistant area supervisor), Peter van der Veen (academic program), Yoav Farhi (coins), Itamar Taxel (pottery analysis) and Pavel Shrago (photography). One hundred and fifty volunteers participated in the four-week program (3 weeks of it during the war in Lebanon), 14 of whom were students from Heidelberg University. Others came from the USA, Canada, Argentina, Australia, China, Germany, England, France and Israel.

Rahel (Aharoni 1956: 146, and Pl. 26: 4; 1964: 46; Fig. 37: 10; Pl. 20: 7), one of which was discovered in the fill in the southwestern corner of the Iron Age citadel (Locus 847, Square 9Q, Level 6.35) together with other material from the Persian period (Aharoni 1964: 46); and two stamp impressions discovered at the City of David in a single pottery basket (Stratum 9, Area E, L. 1364) dating from a clear Persian-period context (Ariel and Shoham 2000: 145 [L30; L31]). All five were probably impressed by the same seal.⁵ For a further discussion of this type of stamp impression, see Vanderhooft and Lipschits, pp. XXX, this issue of *Tel Aviv*.

Stamp Impression Number 2: yhwd



This stamp impression (4141/1) was discovered during the 2005 excavation season in Locus 420 (Area D), in an earth fill that was sealed below a pavement dating to the Byzantine period (probably Stratum II of Aharoni's excavations) and above a floor dated to the late Roman period. The pottery is pinkish-red with a grey core and many small white inclusions. The impression is on the upper part of a handle, stamped with the top of the seal facing to the left side of the handle. The circular stamp impression (diameter 21.6 mm) is quite faint, but the four letters *yhwd* are nevertheless clearly visible.

The letters are fairly small, leaving the bottom half of the stamp impression empty. The *yod* is 5 mm high; its downstroke slants to the left, while its bottom stroke angles sharply upward to the right. The downstroke of the *he* also slants to the left; its top bar forms a right angle with the downstroke but is not fully preserved. The *waw* is 5 mm high and is Y-shaped, which is unusual for the Aramaic lapidary script. The top of the *dalet*, which is rarely fully impressed in this type, is very near the left edge of the impression and appears to be open.

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 3 .

Stamp Impression Number 3: yhwd



This stamp impression (3038/1) was found during the 2005 excavation season while cleaning the surface of the northern side of Area C1 (Locus 310). The pottery is orange-pink with a brown-grey core and white inclusions. This is a round stamp impression (diameter 18.4 mm), impressed on the upper side of the handle. The break in the handle is just above the top side of the impression. The letters are illegible, except for a single faint stroke in the middle, probably a trace of the same

⁵ Avigad published three unprovenanced bullae with very similar impressions (1976: 4–5; pl. 5: a–c), but he also recognized that the bullae were not impressed by the same seal that produced the jar stamps (1976: 5).

type of *waw* that appears in Stamp Impression Number 2, with which this stamp impression may be compared.

Forty-one stamp impressions of this type are now known: 35 were found at Ramat Raḥel, three at En Gedi, two at the City of David and one at Gezer. This type is the fourth most common among all types of Yehud stamp impressions. It is the most numerous type of the group we would date to the late 6th and 5th centuries BCE. At least two different seals produced stamp impressions of this type; the two newly-discovered exemplars belong to Subtype a, of which 13 exemplars are known (ten from Ramat Raḥel, two from En Gedi and one from the City of David). For further details, see Vanderhoof and Lipschits, pp. XXX, this issue of *Tel Aviv*.

Stamp Impression Number 4: *lyh^czr*



This stamp impression (4165/1) was found during the 2005 excavation season in Locus 405, a large pit in Area D that contains pottery dated to several periods. The pottery is grey-brown with a grey core and white inclusions, some of which are quite large. The stamp impression is on the upper part of a handle. It has six letters stamped on two lines (four letters on the upper line and two on the lower line); the top of the stamp impression faces the base of the jar. The stamp impression is circular (diameter 17 mm) and the letters are clear, like numerous other exemplars of the type.

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 5.

Stamp Impression Number 5: *lyh^czr*



This stamp impression (3235) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 342, described as topsoil in area C1. The pottery is brownish-pink with a thick grey core and many small and large white inclusions. This is a round stamp impression (diameter 18.7 mm) located on the upper side of a handle. The top of the impression faces the rim of the jar. There are four letters on the first line and two on the second; all of the letters are retrograde. The letters are clear and it is easy to measure the dimensions of the indicative letters: The downstroke of the *lamed* is 3.1 mm long; the downstroke of the *yod* 2.8 mm; the downstroke of the *he* 2.2 mm; the upper side of the *zayin* 2.0 mm; and the downstroke of *reš* 2.7 mm. These measurements conform to other stamp impressions of this type.

Thirteen stamp impressions of this type are known: 11 are from Ramat Raḥel; one from Jericho; and one newly-published from Rogem Gannim. All the stamp impressions were evidently stamped by the same seal. The *yod* is cursive. The *he* is somewhat badly formed but is quite clear and possesses an oblique upper stroke. The

ʿayin is not quite fully closed. The zayin, on the second line, is rounded at the top but is attested in the lapidary Aramaic sequence. The reš has an open head formed by a single curved stroke. Exact parallels to these two stamp impressions can be found in Aharoni's publications (1956: 145, Figs. 13–14, Pl. 5, 25; 1962, Fig. 2: 7, Pl. 31: 8; 1964, Pl. 21: 9–10; and see now also the clear exemplar published as a postscript in Greenberg and Cinamon 2006: 240).

Lidzbarski (1915: 45) correctly read the Jericho stamp impression (the only one known in his day) as *lyhʿzr*. He recognized that the stamped letters were incised in positive, yielding a mirror-image impression.⁶

Stamp Impression Number 6: yhw-d-phwʿ



This stamp impression (4483/1) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 900 (Area D1), an earth fill inside a partially-built and partially rock-cut trench of indeterminate date.

The pottery is brownish-gray with a gray core, many small white inclusions and some larger white inclusions. The oval impression was stamped on the upper part of a handle with its top facing up. It is 15.5 mm high but is broken on its right edge.

Other stamp impressions of this type read *yhw-d-phwʿ*. The first line reads from right to left, *dwhy*, and the second line reads from right to left [*p*]whʿ.

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 7 .

Stamp Impression Number 7: yhw-d-phwʿ



This stamp impression (3247) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 316 (Area C1, Square 157), an intentional earth fill that covered installations connected to a water system dating to the Iron Age II and Persian period. The pottery is pinkish-orange with a gray core, many tiny white inclusions and some larger white inclusions. The oval stamp impression (15.9 mm high × 19.8 mm wide) was stamped on the upper part of a handle, with the top of the seal facing left. The reading of the stamp impression is [*d*]why / [*p*]whʿ, partially inscribed in mirror image, and of a poor quality. The first line reads from right to left, *dwhy*. The second line reads from right to left, [*p*]whʿ.

⁶ Sellin and Watzinger accepted Lidzbarski's reading but transcribed the name as *Azaryah* (1913: 158). Aharoni originally accepted Lidzbarski's explanation that the impressions were in mirror image, but he read these stamp impressions as *ldhʿyw* (1956: 145–46), and later as *phwʿ* (1962: 7) with four letters [ODED IS THIS A MISTAKE????] and a kind of emblem or 'monogram' (1962: 32; 1964: 21). Close inspection reveals that Lidzbarski's initial proposal was correct.

Eleven stamp impressions of this type are known: ten from Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1962: 8–9, Fig. 9: 2–3, 5–6; Pl. 9: 1, 3, 5, 6; 1964: 22, 45; Pl. 20: 1–3) and one from Khirbet Nisya, which is 2 km southeast of el-Bireh.⁷ The two newly-published impressions were stamped by the same seal, like six others of this subtype, all of them from Ramat Raḥel. Another seal was used for the other three stamp impressions, including the one from Khirbet Nisya.

Stamp Impression Number 8: yhd



This stamp impression (5080) was found on May 24, 2006, while cleaning the dump northwest of Area C formed by Aharoni's 1954 and 1959–1962 excavations (Locus 560). The fabric is pinkish-brown and well fired. The impression is on the upper part of a handle broken on its left side, stamped horizontally with the top of the letters facing the rim. The stamp impression is rectangular and is 17 mm high. Only the *yod* is clearly visible. It is upright with an unusually long, horizontal bottom stroke that extends well to the left of the downstroke. The length of the downstroke is 9.7 mm.

Although the stamp impression is only partially preserved, its shape, its length, the unusual form of the *yod* and the length of its downstroke all clearly indicate that this is one more exemplar of a well-known type reading *yhd*. There are many exact parallels in the finds from Ramat Raḥel (e.g., Aharoni 1964: 21, Pl. 19: 4) and the City of David (Ariel and Shoham 2000: 149, L53; Reich and Shukron, in this issue of *Tel Aviv*, pp. xxx no. 2).

Ninety-seven exemplars from at least nine different seals have the reading *yhd*; 57 of them were found at Ramat Raḥel. This particular stamp impression subtype is not one of the most common, and we know of only ten parallels to it. Of these, two were discovered at the City of David (Ariel and Shoham 2000: 149, L53; Reich and Shukron, this issue of *Tel Aviv*, pp. XXX, No. 9), six at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1962: 6, Fig. 8: 8), one at Tell en-Naṣbeh (McCown 1947: 164–165, Pl. 57: 19) and one is unprovenanced (in Ha'aretz Museum).

Stamp Impression Number 9: yhd



This stamp impression (3089) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 317 (Square 219), in Area C1 (see description above, Stamp Impression Number 1). The pottery is brownish-pink with a grey-brown core and small white and black inclusions. The stamp impression is oval (22 × 11.5 mm) and is stamped on the upper part of a handle with the top of the seal facing to the right. The left part of the seal is

⁷ This stamp impression was read correctly by Cross, and see Livingston 2003: 86, Fig. 6: 6.

clarify

stamped less deeply than the right. The handle is broken just to the left of the *dalet*. The downstroke of the *yod* measures 6.8 mm; that of the *he* 7.1 mm; while the *dalet* [the entire letter???] is 6.1 mm.

Ninety-seven *yhd* stamp impressions are known. Eighteen of them were produced by the seal that produced this impression. Six of the 18 were discovered at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1956: 148 [cf. Hestrin *et. al.* 1973: 68, no. 152]; 1962: 31, Pl. 31: 7; 1964: 21), six at the City of David (Cook 1924: 182, no. 2, Pl. V: ib; 1925, Pl. 4: 23; Duncan 1925, Pl. 4: 16; 1931: 141; Ariel and Shoham 2000: 149, L46–L50), two at Tell en-Naṣbeh (Badè 1930: 14; McCown 1947: 164–165, Pl. 57: 1, 3), two at Jericho (Sellin and Watzinger 1913: 159; Pl. 42: m, m1; Mitteilungen der DOG vol. 39, Dec. 1908, p. 39, and abb. 18), one at Nebi Samwil (Magen and Har-Even, this issue of *Tel Aviv*, pp. xxx, Pl. 1: 4) and one is of unknown origin (Hecht Museum).

Stamp Impression Number 10: yh

This stamp impression (3006/1) was found during the 2005 excavation season in Area C, Locus 301, described as topsoil. The pottery is pinkish-orange with large white grits and a grey core with a light pink to beige wash. The circular stamp impression (diameter 23 mm), is on the upper part of a handle. Only the top of the *yod* is clearly visible, perhaps due to smudging by the potter spreading the wash. The marks of his work all over the handle are clearly visible, covering the interior of the stamp impression. The 5 mm top bar of the *yod* and the diameter of the stamp impression are identical to many other exemplars of this type, most of them found in Ramat Raḥel. This permits us to confirm the reading *yh* for this stamp impression, which is identical to other exemplars from the site (Aharoni 1962, Pl. 31: 3; 1964, Pl. 19: 1–2) and from the City of David (Ariel and Shoham 2000: 150–151, L57–60).

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 14.

Stamp Impression Number 11: yh

This stamp impression (5010) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Area D2, Locus 510, defined as topsoil. The pottery is light orange with a grey core and many white inclusions along with some black inclusions. The round stamp impression (24 × 22 mm) was stamped on the top side of the handle. There are clear signs of a bezel (diameter 19–20 mm), and the shape of the letters is characteristic of the classical lapidary Aramaic. The downstroke of the *yod* is 10 mm long; that of the *he* 6.5 mm. It is 16 mm from the top right of the *yod* to the top left of the *he*.

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 14.

Stamp Impression Number 12: yh



This stamp impression (3130) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 316 of Area C1, defined as fill (see above, Stamp Impression Number 7). The pottery is pinkish-orange, with signs of pink-brown slip, grey core and many white inclusions alongside a few black inclusions. The round stamp impression (17.5 × 18.2 mm) was stamped on the top of the handle. There are clear signs of a bezel (diameter 15.2–15.6 mm). The *yod* has a curved upper stroke that is longer than the bottom stroke. The downstroke is 6.5 mm long. The *he* is the usual Aramaic type .

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 14.

Stamp Impression Number 13: yh



This stamp impression (3281) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 353 (Area C1, Square 198), defined as an intentional earth fill covering a lime kiln dated to the early Hellenistic period. The pottery is brownish-pink on the surface, orange color on the inner side with a grey core and some white inclusions. The round stamp impression (19.5 × 20.0 mm) was stamped on the top side of a handle facing the base of the jar. The seal evidently slipped downward slightly during stamping; there is evidence of smudging and a duplication of the lower stroke of the *yod*. The bezel measures 15.6–16.0 mm in diameter. The letters have broad strokes and uneven proportions. The upper line of the *yod* is faint. The bottom line (4.5 mm) is double, as noted. The downstroke is 8.6 mm long. The *he* is only partly visible. It is like Type 12.

For parallels and further discussion, see Stamp Impression Number 14.

Stamp Impression Number 14: yh



This stamp impression (3325) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 358 (Area C1, Square 158–7), described as an intentional earth fill covering installations related to a water system dating to the Iron Age II and Persian period. The pottery is brownish-pink, with a grey core and many white inclusions, some of them large. The round stamp impression (20.0 × 20.5 mm) was stamped on the top side of the handle with the top of the seal facing to the right. There are clear signs of a bezel. The stamp impression was damaged inside the bezel; perhaps the clay was too wet when stamped. The bezel is very thick; part of the middle of the *yod* was damaged as was the lower part of the *he*. The handle was broken just on the top edge of the seal. The letters have wide strokes and uneven proportions. The upper line of the *yod* is 5.1 mm long, and the bottom line 6 mm long. The downstroke is broken.

One hundred seventy-four stamp impressions of various subtypes with the reading *yh* have been recorded thus far; 88 (more than 50%) were found at Ramat Raḥel. Stamp Impressions Numbers 10–14 discussed here are part of the most common sub-types, with 100 identical stamp impressions: 66 of them from Ramat Raḥel; 17 from the City of David; five each from Jericho and Tell en-Naṣbeh; three from Rogem Gannim; two from En Gedi; and one each from Gezer and Tell Jemmeh.

Stamp Impression Number 15: yh overlapping



This stamp impression (3187) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Locus 326 (Square 177), defined as an intentional earth fill. The pottery is light orange-pink with a grey core and white inclusions. The round stamp impression (diameter 20.2 mm) is on the upper side of a handle, and the letters are on a slight diagonal facing the base. Our reading is *yh*, with the two letters overlapping. Twelve such examples are known, all of them from Ramat Raḥel.

Stamp Impression Number 16: yh ligature



This stamp impression (3172) was found during the 2005 excavation season in Locus 311 of Area C1: topsoil above Pool 2, dating to the Iron Age II and Persian period. The pottery is orange-pink with a brownish-pink slip, grey core and white inclusions. The upper side of the square stamp impression is 11.8 mm long; the lower part is broken. Parts of the letters are invisible and only the upper left corner is clear. The impression is very shallow, and the two ligatured letters are carved in thick lines. It is situated few centimetres below the upper part of the handle. The proportions are different from the usual stamp impressions of this type, with shorter downstroke (8.6 mm) and two parallel horizontal lines (the lower one is 8.1 mm long and the upper one 8.7 mm). The stamp was incised in relief, producing a sunken impression.

Fifty-four stamp impressions of this type are known, and this is only the third exemplar discovered at Ramat Raḥel. Two other exemplars were discovered by Aharoni (1956: 149, Pl. 26: 8; 1964, Fig. 11: 14). Forty stamp impressions (75%) of this type from the Hasmonean period were discovered in various areas of Jerusalem.

Stamp Impression Number 17: yhd-ṭ



This stamp impression (3292) was found during the 2006 excavation season in Area C1, Locus 352, described as lime kiln refuse, consisting of many small pieces of chalk stone. The pottery is pinkish-orange, very well fired, with no visible core, and many small white inclusions. The round stamp impression (diameter 16.7 mm) was stamped on the upper part of a handle.

The *yod* is on the upper left side of the stamp impression. The downstroke is 4.8 mm long and the upper horizontal line 4 mm. The lower horizontal line is also 4.8 mm long, and the middle horizontal line is very narrow, almost invisible, and much shorter (1.7 mm).

The *dalet* is below the *yod*, in negative, with a closed, triangular head. The downstroke is 4.9 mm long and reaches the edge of the stamp impression.

The *he* is to the right edge of the *yod* and the *dalet*. The downstroke is 7.5 mm long and there are three bars facing to the right, making the letter retrograde. The upper one is 3.5 mm long, the middle one 4 mm (reaching the edge of the stamp impression) and the lower one 3.5 mm, also touching the edge of the stamp impression. This is a characteristic palaeo-Hebrew form.

The *ṭ* is just above the upper right side of the *yod*. It is a circle with a single stroke dividing it.

This stamp impression has small pieces of pottery fused to the upper part of the impression, just below where the handle was attached to the jar. The largest piece is on the upper part of the impression, showing that it was evidently stamped before the final work on the jar.

Eighty-five stamp impressions of this type are known, Twenty-seven of them (less than a third) were discovered at Ramat Raḥel. Forty-five (more than half) were discovered in the environs of Jerusalem at sites dating to the Hasmonean period.

SUMMARY

The 17 new stamp impressions published here are only a small addition to the 240 known Yehud stamp impressions found at Ramat Raḥel to date. They join the growing list of stamp impressions that emphasize the central administrative role of Ramat Raḥel during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Unfortunately, as was the case with previous Yehud stamp impressions from Ramat Raḥel, the new stamped handles were found outside their original contexts, mostly in late fills. We can only hope that further excavations at the site will yield many additional stamped handles in primary archaeological contexts.

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