

Royal Judahite Jar Handles: Reconsidering the Chronology of the *lmlk* Stamp Impressions

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The paper proposes a new chronology for the *lmlk* and the so-called 'private' Judahite stamp impressions. It suggests that the *lmlk* stamp impression system was introduced in the final quarter of the 8th century BCE when Judah became an Assyrian vassal kingdom, and that it should be interpreted in light of the new economic and administrative policies that became operative in Judah during this period. The paper maintains that the *lmlk* system persisted and developed after Sennacherib's 701 BCE campaign, reusing old jars from sites not destroyed in the onslaught and also producing new jars with new types of stamp impressions. The paper further suggests that the jars with the so-called private stamp impressions were limited in number and restricted in distribution (primarily to the Shephelah of Judah), and were manufactured for only a short time (from 704–701 BCE) as part of Judah's preparations against the impending Assyrian campaign.

KEYWORDS *lmlk*, Judahite stamp handles, Assyrian empire, Sennacherib's campaign, Kingdom of Judah

Conventional dating of the *lmlk* stamp impressions

Ever since the largest corpus of *lmlk* stamp impressions was discovered in the destruction layer of Lachish III, the date of these impressions has been at the core of the debate over the chronology of the destruction of Levels III and II of the site.¹

¹ Diringer (1941: 106; 1949: 85–86), who agreed with the dating of the destruction of Lachish III to 597 BCE, dated the royal stamp impressions to the end of the 8th and the 7th centuries. In his opinion, they were in use throughout the 7th century, during the reigns of Kings Manasseh and Josiah. Albright (1940), Lapp (1960) and Cross (1969) accepted this view. Cross (*ibid.*: 21–22) even reduced the duration of the use of the stamp impressions, dated it to the second half of the 7th century, thus limiting it to the reign of King Josiah.

The commonly accepted assumption among scholars until the 1970s was that the ‘four-winged scarab’ antedated the ‘two-winged disc’ (called ‘flying scroll’) impressions. The transition from the ‘four-winged scarab’ to the ‘two-winged disc’ impressions was ascribed to Josiah’s religious and cultic reform. This transition was even used to reinforce the dating of this stamp impression system to Josiah’s reign.²

Following Ussishkin’s excavations at Lachish (1973–1994), which dated the destruction of Level III to Sennacherib’s campaign in Judah (701 BCE), most scholars came to agree with a late 8th century dating of the *lmlk* stamp impressions and associated them with the reign of Hezekiah. The archaeological and stratigraphic basis for fixing the chronological differences between the four- and two-winged stamp impressions was abandoned, since both types had been discovered together in Level III (Ussishkin 1977: 50–54, 56; Na’aman 1979: 73–74).³

Starting in the late 1980s, debate over the date of the *lmlk* stamp impressions began to focus on establishing the precise time of their use in the Judahite administrative and economic system. Na’aman (1986: 16) noted that the majority of stamps found came from the Shephelah of Judah and northern hill country of Judah—areas, he observed, that might have been the main targets of the expected Sennacherib onslaught. Na’aman interpreted this as a reflection of Hezekiah’s preparations for the anticipated Assyrian assault on Judah (704–701 BCE).

Vaughn (1999: 136–152) argued that jars of the *lmlk* type had already appeared at the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 8th century BCE, long before preparations for Sennacherib’s campaign had begun and before Hezekiah’s anointment. He also pointed to the lack of fortifications at the various sites where *lmlk* stamp impressions on jar handles had been discovered, as well as the existence of these stamp impressions at fortified sites not eventually attacked by the Assyrian army (*ibid.*: 141–152). He therefore suggested interpreting the *lmlk* stamp impressions on jar handles not as preparation for onslaught but rather as part of a general reorganization of the administration and economy of the

² Many scholars assumed that since the scarab was Egyptian and therefore pagan in origin, it was replaced by the ‘winged scroll of the law’ in order to divest it of foreign cultic symbols or representation of foreign gods. Diringier (1949: 75–76) argued that it was part of Josiah’s reforms. Diringier (*ibid.*: 85–86), Lapp (1960: 21) and Cross (1969: 20–22) even supported the assumption that from the paleographical standpoint the four-winged stamp impressions preceded the two-winged ones. Tushingham (1970, 1971) suggested that Josiah was using the symbols of the Kingdom of Israel (four-winged scarab) side by side with the symbols of the Kingdom of Judah (two-winged sun disc) in order to ‘unify’ the two nations, as part of his political aspirations.

³ Already Lapp (1960: 18) noticed that “there is no stratigraphic evidence for separating the various types of impressions chronologically”, and based his separation between the four-winged and the two-winged stamp impressions on paleographical grounds only. In the same direction see, e.g., Lance 1971: 324. Tushingham (1992), however, still attempted to defend his previous suggestion, and argued that it was Hezekiah and not Josiah who used the four-winged emblem in order to unite the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Israel with those of the Kingdom of Judah. The two-winged emblem was, according to Tushingham, a Judahite symbol, and that was the reason for its continued use during the 7th century, after the destruction of the northern kingdom.

Kingdom of Judah over an extended period of time, during Hezekiah's reign, from the late 8th to the early 7th century BCE (*ibid.*: 136–140).

To determine the chronological boundaries for the use of the *lmlk* jars, Vaughn pointed to the connection between these stamp impressions and the so-called private stamp impressions. This latter type of stamp impression was defined from the outset of the research as part of the royal Judahite storage jars, and was later linked to the system of the *lmlk* stamp impressions (Ussishkin 2004c: 2143).⁴ Private stamp impressions have not been found in an archaeological context that is dated later than the horizon of Level III at Lachish, so they have been dated to the end of the 8th century (Vaughn 1999: 97–98, and see below). In Vaughn's view, assuming that every Lachish III private stamp impression bearing a person's name and patronymic was stamped by a specific individual, all other stamp impressions that bear this particular name would have been stamped at a time contemporary with Lachish Level III. Vaughn (*ibid.*: 95–96) further assumed that, since official seals belonged to adults, the possible future use of those seals may be limited to no more than approximately 20 years after the destruction of Lachish Level III. He therefore argued that it is reasonable to assume that stamp impressions found on jar handles from the end of the 8th century were all in use during Hezekiah's rule before and after 701 BCE. Vaughn also employed this conclusion to determine the time span for the use of the *lmlk* stamp impressions (*ibid.*: 99–110). He argued that since the *lmlk* and the private stamp impressions were part of the same phenomenon, the conclusive dating of the private stamp impressions to the late 8th century, without significant use in the 7th, would also apply to the *lmlk* stamp impressions. Most scholars have agreed with this dating of the private as well as of the *lmlk* stamp impressions (see, e.g., Fox 2000: 216–235; Blakely and Hardin 2002: 11–13; Kletter 2002).⁵

There are two problems with Vaughn's dating methodology. First, from the quantitative point of view: more than 2000 *lmlk* stamp impressions are known (approximately 1500 were discovered in archaeological excavations and surveys), as opposed to 260 private stamp impressions (187 of which were found in archaeological excavations and surveys). Second, in order to date the *lmlk* stamp impressions, Vaughn relied only on the archaeological context of the private stamp impressions and omitted important

⁴ A royal storage jar handle bearing a *lmlk*, as well as a private stamp impression, was discovered at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1962: 16, Fig. 14: 2, Pl. 6: 2). At Lachish, royal storage jars were found with *lmlk* and private stamp impressions on different handles of the same jar (Ussishkin 1976: 5; 2004c: 2143), while other private stamp impressions were found in the same loci with *lmlk* stamp impressions (*idem* 1976: 6–12). From the petrographic point of view, Mommsen, Perlman and Yellin (1984) have already demonstrated that jars stamped with private seals were produced at the same location as those stamped with *lmlk* seals.

⁵ Blakely and Hardin (2002) tried to use the *lmlk* stamp impression as a chronological tool, in order to date the destruction levels of various sites in the Shephelah and the northern Negev. But their methodology was wrong because they dated the *lmlk* stamp impressions exclusively to the late 8th century, even though some of the stamp impressions represent continuous use during the 7th century (Mazar, Amit and Ilan 1996, and see further discussion below). Furthermore, they suggested chronological conclusions based on *lmlk* stamp impressions found on the surface in Tel Ḥalif, arguing that it represents "reuse" after Sennacherib's destruction of 701 BCE (*ibid.*: 24). Finkelstein and Na'aman (2004: 61–69, and see esp. p. 64) criticized this methodology, emphasizing that there is no link between stratigraphy and surface finds, which usually represent all occupation levels at a site.

archaeological data concerning the *mlk* stamp impressions. As will be shown below, the private stamp impressions are very well dated to the end of the 8th century whereas the *mlk* stamp impressions are part of a much wider phenomenon. They were unearthed in clearly dated 7th century BCE archaeological contexts (see, e.g., Mazar, Amit and Ilan 1996: 208; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 196–197; Na’aman 2001: 270–271, 273; Stern 2007: 139–141),⁶ and even continued to be produced during this period.

Commencement of the *mlk* stamp impression system

Most scholars now concur that Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah in 701 BCE provides a clear *terminus ad quem* for the *mlk* stamp impressions, and that except for the very limited reuse of jars at sites not destroyed, it was at this point in time that the system fell into disuse.

Regarding commencement of the *mlk* system, it should be noted that *mlk* jars (Types SJO3 and SJO4 according to the typology suggested by Gitin 2006) had already appeared by the late 9th/early 8th century BCE (Vaughn 1999: 138–140; Shai and Maier 2003; Gitin 2006). As already mentioned, the largest corpus of stamp impressions was discovered in the destruction layer of Lachish III, but this level had a long life and had already been founded in the first half of the 8th century BCE (Ussishkin 2004b: 82). That said, there is no accurate archaeological answer to the question of the extent to which the *mlk* impressions preceded the Sennacherib campaign. The suggestion that the system of *mlk* stamp impressions reflects the short period of the preparations before the campaign (704–701 BCE) is a historical hypothesis that leaves several unresolved issues. The large quantity of stamped handles and the numerous seals that were in use (illustrated by the many diverse types) indicate that a sophisticated administrative system was in place. It is implausible that such an elaborate system could develop in the three or four years between the revolt of Hezekiah and the Assyrian campaign. It is also hard to imagine that so complex a system of jar manufacture at a single centre, distribution for filling at a variety of agricultural estates and finally storage at royal hubs was developed and carried out on such a massive scale in a mere three years.⁷ The sizeable number of *mlk* storage

⁶ Vaughn (1999: 95–109) did not accept these finds as proof of the continued use of these stamp impressions during the first half of the 7th century BCE. He argued that in all cases in which *mlk* stamp impressions were discovered in 7th century strata, they should be interpreted as residual. He further argued that the case of Ḥorvat Shilḥah, where no private stamp impressions were discovered, is exceptional and that no general conclusion can be deduced from this case (*ibid.*: 109).

⁷ According to Fox (2000: 226–235; following, e.g., Galling 1937: 339; Sellin 1943; Tufnell [in Diringer 1949: 80]; Lapp 1960: 22; Rainey 1967: 41; 1982: 57; Welten 1969: 133–142, 173–174; Cross 1969: 21; Mettinger 1971: 95–97; Lemaire 1975b: 680), the place names on stamp impressions did not indicate the destination of the royal jars, but rather their origin, probably royal vineyards or royal estates. The jars were made and stamped at a royal centre in the Shephelah. From this place they were sent to the royal estates (*s(w)kh*, *zyp*, *ḥbrn* and *mmšt*), where they were filled with produce (wine or oil). These products were then distributed across the kingdom, stored in cities, administrative centres and fortresses, as well as private hands (hence jars were also found in private dwellings and small rural sites). It is even possible that some of the product was used for individual trade in local markets.

jars found compared, for example, to the number of rosette stamped jars, also testifies to the length of time this system must have been operative.

Any attempt to date the initial use of the *lmlk* system should consider it in the context of the changes in the economy and administration of Judah during the late 8th century.

Our point of departure is the assumption that many of the changes occurred after Judah became an Assyrian vassal kingdom, when it had to pay tribute and taxes in kind (mainly wine, oil and grain). Na'aman (2001: 270–274) and Lipschits and Gadot (2008; Lipschits 2009; Lipschits, Gadot, Arubas and Oeming 2009) argued that Ramat Raḥel was initially founded as a Judahite administrative centre under the supervision and guidance of imperial forces. The rise of agricultural estates in the Rephaim Valley (Lipschits and Gadot 2008), and probably also in the area around Moza (De-Groot and Greenhut 2002; Greenhut 2006; Greenhut and De-Groot 2009), together with the dramatic increase in the number of farms, small villages and agricultural installations around Jerusalem by the late 8th century BCE (Katz 2008: 171–178, with further literature), can be explained as resulting from the demand for additional agricultural products. It can also explain the technological changes in the agricultural production installations that occurred in Judah at this time (Faust and Weiss 2005; Katz 2008: 55–59). Moreover, at this juncture a significant change also occurred in Judahite pottery, which evolved from non-standardized, small-scale production in local workshops to a standardized mass-production industry with a limited variety of shapes and a broad distribution network (Mazar 1990: 509; Zimhoni 1997: 171–172; 2004: 1705–1707; Katz 2008: 52–53). This change also included the new system of marked weights that appeared in Judah at the end of the 8th century (Kletter 1998: 145–147; Katz 2008: 77–79, with further literature), and the production of storage jars that were larger than those previously used (Zimhoni 2004: 1706). All the above changes point to a centralized royal economy, which improved agricultural production and its transportation under the guidance of a central authority.

It is our opinion that the *lmlk* stamp impressions represent another feature of the administrative and economic system established in Judah when it became an Assyrian vassal kingdom. It 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. The large quantity of *lmlk* stamp impressions found at Ramat Raḥel, a site that continued to serve as an administrative centre for collecting agricultural produce until the end of the Persian period, supports this assumption. Accordingly, we may tentatively date the beginning of the *lmlk* stamp impression system to the last quarter of the 8th century, the period when Judah became a vassal kingdom, either in the final years of King Ahaz' rule or the early days of King Hezekiah's reign.

Termination of the *lmlk* stamp impression system

At least half the *lmlk* stamped handles were discovered in hill country sites of Judah (Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel, Mizpah and Gibeon) not destroyed during Sennacherib's

campaign and inhabited during the 7th century BCE (Na'aman 2001: 270–274; 2007: 25). Archaeologically, it is impossible to determine whether these stamped handles came from 8th or 7th century BCE contexts.⁸

Nevertheless, some *lmlk* stamp impressions were found in clear 7th century archaeological contexts. Two handles stamped by the same seal come from two sites settled for the first time in the mid-7th century BCE: En-Gedi (Stern 2007: 139–141) and Ḥorvat Shilḥah (Mazar, Amit and Ilan 1996: 208–209). On the jar handle from En-Gedi concentric circles were incised; they are dated to the mid-7th century (see below). An additional stamp impression was found at Khirbet es-Samrah (Cross and Milik 1956: 9–11, Fig. 2), which Mazar, Amit and Ilan (1996: 209), as well as Stern (2007: 140), dated to the second half of the 7th century.⁹ Two *lmlk* stamp impressions were found in Level II at Tel Batash (Timnah), which is dated to the second half of the 7th century (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 194–195, Photo 122, Pl. 51: 12; 195, Photo 124, Pl. 61: 13); a third stamp impression was uncovered in a mixed Levels III and II context, which was dated to the late 8th century (*ibid.*: 194, Photo 123, Pl. 59: 16). It is possible that *lmlk* stamp impressions were also uncovered in a 7th century archaeological context in Jerusalem,¹⁰ and even at Lachish.¹¹

Scholars who insisted on the traditional late 8th century dating of the *lmlk* stamp impressions explained the stamped handles found in clear 7th century archaeological contexts as residual or secondary use of royal jars from sites in the Judahite highlands

⁸ Finkelstein and Na'aman (2004) demonstrated that a few sites in the southern Shephelah, which were destroyed during the Sennacherib campaign, were resettled shortly afterwards, and that the pottery, as well as the *lmlk* stamp impressions discovered at these sites, were identical to the pottery discovered at Lachish Level III. This reinforces the idea that the pottery characteristic of Judah at the end of the 8th century continued to be in use also in the first half of the 7th century, both at sites not destroyed in 701 and at sites destroyed and then resettled (and cf. Na'aman 2007: 25–26).

⁹ Eighth century activity at Khirbet es-Samrah cannot be excluded on the basis of the available data (Vaughn 1999: 108).

¹⁰ In Jerusalem, 61 *lmlk* jar handles were found in the extramural quarter of the City of David. The stamp impressions were found sealed in a fill above a street pavement, outside the city wall dated to Iron Age II (Franken and Steiner 1990: 56). Franken and Steiner dated the construction of the wall and the pavement that adjoins it to 700 BCE. Forty-two of the stamp impressions were found directly on the pavement, 11 in the layer of mud that covered it and eight in a layer of sand that covered the layer of mud (*ibid.*: 129). In addition to the 61 stamp impressions found directly above the street pavement, four more were found: one in Level 3 (which was dated to the 8th century), one in Level 6 (end of 8th–beginning of 7th century) and two in Level 9 (beginning of 6th century). All the stamp impressions found in Kenyon's excavations at the City of David (excluding two, and see *ibid.*; Steiner 2001: 127–130) are of the two-winged type. Yet, here is only a partial publication of the stamp impressions discovered in Kenyon's excavations (*ibid.*), and it is difficult to draw a conclusion about their exact typology.

¹¹ In Level II at Lachish, 14 *lmlk* stamp impressions were found (Ussishkin 2004c: 2135–2138, Impressions Nos. 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 33, 44, 46, 47, 50, 51, 54, 68, 71), most of them not in a clear context. Two stamp impressions should be excluded: a two-winged *šwkh* stamp impression (Type SIIa, Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 71, Pl. 29.15: 7), was found on a floor clearly dated to Level II (Ussishkin 2004a: 620). An identical stamp impression of this type was assigned to Level III (Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 69). The second stamp impression is number 68 (*ibid.*: 2137), which according to its typology should be dated to the 7th century (see below).

that had escaped destruction by Sennacherib (Mazar, Amit and Ilan 1996: 208–209; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 197). While this is a reasonable option, we should also consider the possibility that some *lmlk* jars were produced and stamped *after* Sennacherib's campaign to Judah. The assumed continuity of production of the same type of jar, at the same production centre in the Shephelah, and the continued use of stamped handles of royal jars throughout the 7th century (Gitin 2006), might support this option.

To date, 274 jar handles incised with concentric circles have been found at various sites within the borders of Judah.¹² Of these, 132 were incised on the same handle and next to the *lmlk* stamp impressions (Lipschits, Sergi and Koch forthcoming). The concentric circles were incised after the jars had been fired, indicating that they postdate the stamping of the *lmlk* impressions. The purpose of the concentric circles is not clear,¹³ but the existence of handles bearing concentric circles without *lmlk* stamp impressions indicates that the concentric circles were developed as an independent system of marking the same type of storage jars. The incised circle system cancelled, adapted or replaced its predecessor, the *lmlk* stamp impression system, probably in the mid-7th century.¹⁴ The change of symbol also suggests the continued manufacture of jars at the same production centre in the Shephelah of Judah (Mommmsen, Perlman and Yellin 1984; Yellin and Cahill 2004). The system must have persisted later in the 7th century, when jars were marked with a new symbol, namely the rosette stamp impression (Koch 2008).

The evidence for both the continuation of the manufacturing of royal storage jars and of the use of royal emblems on their handles (*lmlk* stamp impressions, incised concentric circles and rosette stamp impressions), indicates that the administrative-economic system associated with these storage jars remained in place from the late 8th century until the destruction of Judah at the beginning of the 6th century BCE. The same system probably persisted throughout the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, when jars were marked with the *yhwd* stamp impression, and disappeared with the Hasmoneans in the second half of the 2nd century BCE (Vanderhooft and Lipschits 2006). Since the incised concentric circles and the rosette stamp impressions are dated to the middle and late 7th century

¹² Of handles bearing concentric circles, 128 were found in Jerusalem, 41 at Gibeon, 35 at Ramat Rahel—and this by comparison with only six incised handles found in the Shephelah: one at Tel Goded (Bliss 1900: Pl. 6: 1), two at Azekah (Bliss 1899: Pl. 6: 11–12) two at Lachish (Diringer 1953: 343) and one at Tel Batash (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 195, Photo 125 and Pl. 59: 15).

¹³ Pritchard (1959: 20–23) ruled out the possibilities that the incised concentric circles are owner's marks, potter's marks or decorative symbols, and suggested that they represented a cancellation of the *lmlk* stamp impression, a mark indicating that the contents of the storage jar had been checked, or a receipt indicating that the jar had reached its destination. Following the theory that the *lmlk* stamp impressions indicated royal estates, Lapp (1960: 22) suggested other possible interpretations—that they were an indication of the quality of the wine in the jars, its age, or a sign of the reuse of the jar.

¹⁴ Contra the assumption of Yadin (1961: 12); Barkay (1985: 408); Avigad and Barkay (2000: 247); and Stern (2007: 145–147), we posit that the concentric circle system is contemporaneous with or later than the final stage of the late *lmlk* stamp impressions, around the mid-7th century BCE. We base this on the fact that its distribution is similar to the late *lmlk* stamp impression distribution and unlike the distribution of the rosette stamp impressions (see below).

BCE (Koch 2008: 45–47), an attempt to limit the time-frame of the use of *mlk* stamp impressions to the late 8th century BCE leads to the assumption that there was a gap in the manufacture of storage jars and the stamping of royal impressions on their handles after Sennacherib's campaign (in the first half of the 7th century), and that the system resumed only after a hiatus.

Such a hiatus is difficult to explain, especially when seen against the background of King Manasseh's reign and Judah's integration into the Assyrian economic system (Finkelstein 1994; Finkelstein and Na'aman 2004; Fantalkin 2004; Knauf 2005: 168–171). But the fact that royal storage jars continued to be manufactured at the same central workshop, and stamped by the same method of marking the handles, leads to the conclusion that the administrative system lived on. Some of the jars that had been in use during the late 8th century remained in use in the early 7th century BCE, and were preserved at sites not destroyed during the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE. The question that needs to be asked now is: Was the continued use of the jars bearing *mlk* stamp impressions limited to the secondary use of pre-existing jars manufactured and stamped in the late 8th century, or did the manufacturing and stamping of jars continue after the Assyrian campaign in the early 7th century?

The distribution of *mlk* jar handles by impression type

The distribution of the *mlk* stamp impressions has thus far been examined according to either emblem or place name (e.g., Na'aman 1979, 1986; Barkay 1985; Barkay and Vaughn 2004). Most of the *mlk* stamp impressions found in the hill country are of the two-winged type while most found in the Shephelah are of the four-winged type. Given this fact, and since both types were found in the destruction layer of Lachish III, scholars have maintained that all jars were produced in one central location, and that jars stamped with two-winged impressions were sent mainly to hill country sites and jars stamped with four-winged impressions were sent to the Shephelah. The typological differences, it was therefore concluded, were geographical rather than chronological (Na'aman 1986: 11–16; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2168).

To date there has been no examination of the distribution of the stamp impressions according to detailed typology. Our research isolated stamp impression types that appear only in hill-country sites not destroyed in 701 BCE. We hypothesized that if not even one exemplar of a given type was found in a clear 701 BCE destruction level, we could assume that this type was produced after the 701 campaign. If we could demonstrate that these types appeared only at sites that could be clearly dated to the 7th century BCE, then the logical conclusion would be that stamping of new types of *mlk* jar handles was carried on in the 7th century.

To organize our data, we used Lemaire's (1981) typology for classifying *mlk* stamp impressions. Lemaire defined five main types of impressions—two for the four-winged type and three for the two-winged type (see Figs. 1 and 2):

I: Four-winged *lmlk* types

Ia—icons with cursory inscriptions, *lmlk* in upper register and place name in lower register

Ib—icons with lapidary inscriptions, *lmlk* in upper register and place name in lower register

II: Two-winged *lmlk* types

IIa—icons with *lmlk* in upper register and place name in bottom register

IIb—icons with *lmlk* in upper register and place name in bottom register, divided

IIc—icons with place name in upper register, without *lmlk*

Lemaire defined four variants in each of the five main types, according to the first letter of each place name that appears on them:

H—for *hbrn* (=Hebron)

S—for *šwkh* (=Socoh)

Z—for *zyp* (=Ziph)

M—for *mmšt* (= ?)

Lemaire classified one additional type, with no place name, which he designated **XII**.

The following examination of the *lmlk* stamp impression types is limited to those found at sites not destroyed in the course of Sennacherib's 701 BCE campaign, none of them discovered in the destruction level of Lachish III or in other sites associated with the 701 BCE destruction.

Type IIb: Two-winged icon; place name in bottom register, divided

A total of 25 *šwkh* type (SIIb) stamp impressions was found at Gibeon, Mizpah, Ramat Raḥel, Jerusalem, Jericho and Tel Batash.¹⁵ The two found at Tel Batash were associated with Level II, which was dated to the 7th century.¹⁶ In view of the total lack of such stamp impressions on handles from destruction levels associated with the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE, their absence in the Shephelah of Judah (aside from Tel Batash II), and their appearance in large numbers at hill-country sites that continued to exist through the 7th century, it is reasonable to assume that they were stamped only after 701 BCE.

¹⁵ Ten SIIb impressions were found at Gibeon (Pritchard 1959: 24–25, Fig. 8a: 454, Fig. 9: 146, 409, 485). Pritchard recognized only nine of them (Nos. 146, 293, 409, 415, 417, 454, 485, 532, 541), but it seems that Impression 216 should also be recognized as belonging to this type. Four of these were found in Mizpah (McCown 1947: 161), but we can account for only three of the SIIb type. Five were found at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1962: 19, Fig. 15: 8; 1964: 34, Pl. 39: 4–5; Sergi forthcoming a, forthcoming b). Four were found in Jerusalem: one in the Jewish Quarter (Avigad and Barkay 2000: 252, No. 23), two in the Ophel excavations and one in Kenyon's excavations at the City of David. The last three have not yet been published, but the data was collected by Garena (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_jerusalem.htm). It seems that an additional stamp impression of this type was found in Jericho (Sellin and Watzinger 1913: 158, Pl. 42: h).

¹⁶ Impressions 12 and 13 in Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 194–195, Photos 123–124, Pls. 59: 16, 61: 13. It is possible that an additional impression of this type was found in Level II (*ibid.*: 194, No. 11, Photo 122, Pl. 51: 12), but it is blurred and cannot be read. It is more likely that this is a ZIIb type (see below).



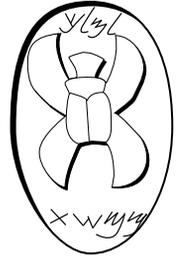
H1a



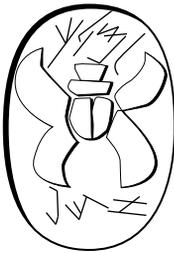
H1b



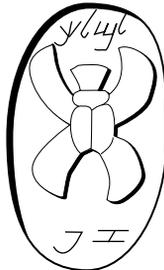
M1a



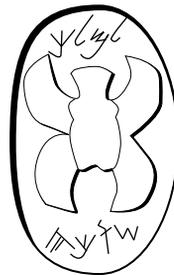
M1b



Z1a



Z1b



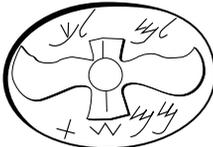
Š1b



H1a



Š1a

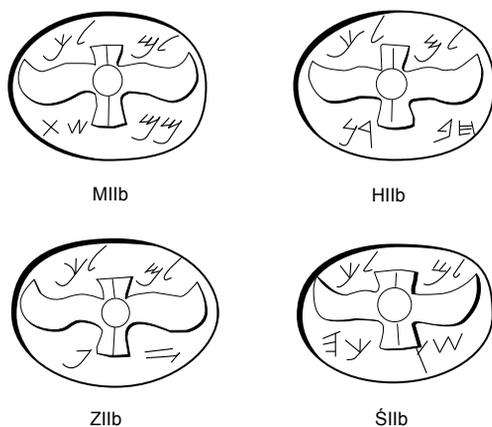


M1a



Z1a

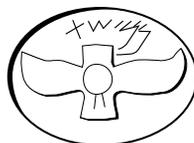
Figure 1 Schematic drawings of 8th century *lmlk* types: four-winged Ia and Ib (top) and two-winged IIa (bottom). Drawings by Ido Koch.



H11c



Z11c



M11c



XII

FIGURE 2 Schematic drawings of 7th century *lmlk* types: two-winged 11b (top), two-winged 11c (centre) and two-winged XII (bottom) . Drawings by Ido Koch.

A total of 74 *zyp* type (ZIIb) stamp impressions was found at Gibeon, Mizpah, Ramat Raḥel, Beth-Zur, Nebi Samwil and Jerusalem.¹⁷ Two additional impressions of this type should be dated to the second half of the 7th century—one discovered at Ḥorvat Shilḥah (Mazar, Amit and Ilan 1996: 208–209), and one at En-Gedi (Stern 2007: 140, Photo 4.7.1.1). Only one stamp impression of this type was identified at Lachish, on the surface, out of context (Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2152, No. 44).¹⁸ Given the rarity of this type at Lachish and its total absence from the destruction of Lachish Level III, plus the fact that 74 stamp impressions were uncovered at sites that existed throughout the 7th century (or had just been settled in the 7th century), it seems that this type, too, was not produced before 701 BCE.

A total of 78 *hbrn* type (HIIb) stamp impressions was found at Gibeon, Mizpah, Ramat Raḥel, Jerusalem, Tell el-Fūl, Beth-Zur and Hebron.¹⁹ A stamp impression of this type was found at Khirbet es-Samrah, which was dated to the 7th century (Cross and Milik 1956: 8,

¹⁷ Eleven ZIIb impressions were found at Gibeon. Pritchard (1959: 25, Fig. 9: 480, 490) identified eight of them (Nos. 367, 480, 489, 490, 500, 507, 531, 540), and it is possible there are three more (*ibid.*: 25–26, Nos. 268, 355, 514). In Mizpah at least four were found (McCown 1947: 161, Pl. 56: 2). At Ramat Raḥel 35 were discovered (Aharoni 1962: 19–20, 47, Fig. 15: 5; 1964: 34, 62–63, Pls. 38: 10–12, 39: 1–2; Sergi forthcoming a, forthcoming b). One was found at Beth-Zur (Sellers and Albright 1931: 8), and about 20 more were found in Jerusalem: four or five in the Ophel excavations (Nadelman 1989: 134, Nos. 20–24, Photos 151–155; Garena states that Impressions 22 and 24 are in fact one and the same. See http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_jerusalem.htm). We assume that an additional impression of this type was found at the Ophel excavations but went unrecognized by Nadelman (*ibid.*: No. 126, Photo 157). Six were identified in Shiloh's excavation at the City of David, but it is possible there are two more (Shoham 2000: 76, Nos. 17–24, Pl. 79: 17, 19, 20, 22, 23). Four were found in the Jewish Quarter (Avigad and Barkay 2000: 252, Nos. 9–12), and according to the data collected by Garena (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_jerusalem.htm) five additional impressions were found in Kenyon's excavations at the City of David but were not published. On the Nebi Samwil stamp impressions, see the photo in Magen 2008: 41.

¹⁸ Three two-winged *lmlk zyp* impressions were found at Lachish (Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2151–2159, Nos. 3, 102, 274), but their exact type was not identified, and they were discovered on the surface.

¹⁹ Sixteen HIIb stamp impressions were found at Gibeon. Pritchard identified nine of them (1959: 24, Nos. 123, 356, 397, 416, 456, 457, 498, 555, 563, Fig. 8: 456), but there may be seven more that he did not identify (*ibid.*: 25–26, Nos. 118, 253, 318, 337, 411, 459, 488). McCown (1947: 161) counted five at Mizpah, and Garena identified one more (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_nasbeh.htm). Eighteen were found at Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1962: 47, Fig. 15: 6, Pl. 7: 5; 1964: 62–63, Pl. 38: 7–9; Sergi forthcoming a, forthcoming b). Twenty-five were found in Jerusalem. Eight were discovered in Shiloh's excavations at the City of David (Shoham 2000: 76, Nos. 8–15, Pl. 1: 8–14), and two more from the City of David may also be of this type (*ibid.*: Nos. 29–30, Pl. 2: 29–30). Seven were found in the Jewish Quarter (Avigad and Barkay 2000: 252, Nos. 18–22, 30–31; 260, No. 18; 261, Nos. 19–22; 262, Nos. 30–31). Two more were found in the Ophel excavations (Nadelman 1989: 134, Nos. 17, 41, 139: 148), and three more were discovered in Duncan's excavation in the Ophel (1931: 139). It seems that an additional three of this type were excavated by Kenyon in the City of David, but they were not published (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_jerusalem.htm). A single stamp impression of this type was found at Tell el-Fūl (Lapp 1981: 111, Pl. 28: 4, Fig. 29: 2). At Beth-Zur two stamp impressions of this type were found (Sellers and Albright 1931: 8), and Garena added another from this site. The stamp impression from Hebron is mentioned only by Garena (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_zur.htm).

Photo 2).²⁰ A few stamp impressions of this type come from sites destroyed by Sennacherib. Three stamped jar handles were found at Arad (Aharoni 1981: 126: 1–3), but not in a clear stratigraphical context (Singer-Avitz 2002: 144). Two were uncovered at Lachish (Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 68, Photo 15.29: 7; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2152, No. 41), one of them in a locus that contained mixed material from both Levels III and II,²¹ and the other on the surface. Given that this type is very rare at Lachish, and was not found in a clear stratigraphical context, and that it appears in large numbers at sites not destroyed in 701 BCE, we may conclude that this type, too, was part of the 7th century system.

A total of 47 *mmšt* type (MIIb) stamp impressions was found at Gibeon, Mizpah, Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel and Beth-Zur.²² One was found at Lachish (Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2158, No. 315), but in an unclear archaeological context.²³ Since this type appears in large numbers at sites not destroyed in 701 BCE, we conclude that it functioned as part of the 7th century distribution system. Stamp impressions of this type were also found at Tel ʿErani (on the surface), Tel Jezreel and Khirbet Sharta (Qiryat Ata / Kefar Ata), all of them located outside the boundaries of the Kingdom of Judah.²⁴

Type IIIc: icons with place name in upper register, without lmlk

Another type of *lmlk* stamp impression that probably post-dates 701 BCE is the two-winged impression that has the place name in the upper register and does not contain the word *lmlk*. Sixteen stamp impressions of this type have been discovered, none at sites in the Shephelah of Judah. Only *hbrn* (IIIc), *mmšt* (MIIc) and *zyp* (ZIIc) impressions of this type have been found; no impressions of the *śwkh* type have been discovered.

²⁰ The exact type of the stamp impression from Khirbet es-Samrah is hard to identify, and the other possibility is that it is of the MIIb type.

²¹ The stamp impression was found in Locus 4343, which contained material from Level III, and was disturbed by a foundation trench that belonged to Level II (Ussishkin 2004a: 620).

²² At Gibeon Pritchard recognized six stamp impressions of this type (1959: 24, Nos. 106, 486, 487, 499, 520, 522), and it is possible that there is one more (*ibid.*: 25, No. 105). One stamp impression of this type was found at Tell el-Fûl (Lapp 1981: 111, Pl. 28: 1–2, Fig. 29: 1). Even though McCown classified ten stamp impressions bearing the name *mmšt* from Mizpah (1947: 161), it seems that only three are of the MIIb type (and cf. the data collected by Garena at http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_nasbeh.htm). Twelve stamp impressions of this type have been discovered in Jerusalem: four were found in Shiloh's excavations at the City of David (Shoham 2000: 76, Nos. 25–28, Pl. 2: 25–27), four were unearthed in the excavations at the Jewish Quarter (Avigad and Barkay 2000: 252, Nos. 13–16), and it seems that four more were found in Kenyon's excavations at the City of David and in Duncan and Macalister's excavations at the Ophel (according to the data collected by Garena, who counted 14 stamp impressions of this type in Jerusalem, and see http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_jerusalem.htm). At Ramat Raḥel 20 stamp impressions of this type were retrieved (Aharoni 1962: 47; 1964: 62–63, Pl. 39: 8–11; Sergi forthcoming a, forthcoming b). It is possible that one more stamp impression of this type was found at Khirbet es-Samrah (Cross and Milik 1956: 8, Photo No. 2).

²³ At Lachish, two two-winged *lmlk mmšt* stamp impressions were found that cannot be positively identified, and so it is not clear whether or not they are of the MIIb type (Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2156–2157, Nos. 231, 273). Both were discovered on the surface.

²⁴ See the data gathered by Garena (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_m2d.htm), with further literature.

Of the *ħbrn* type (HIIC), only four stamp impressions have thus far been found—one each at Gibeon, Mizpah, Nebi Samwil and Hebron.²⁵

Of the *mmšt* type (MIIC), six stamp impressions have been found—two at Mizpah, and one each at Tell el-Fûl, the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel and Gezer.²⁶

Of the *zyp* type (ZIIc), three stamp impressions were found at Gibeon, and one more each at Mizpah, Jerusalem and Gezer.²⁷

Since no stamp impressions of this type were found at sites destroyed in 701 BCE, we may conclude that it functioned as part of the 7th century system.

Type XII: Two-winged icon without place name

An additional type of stamp impression found only at sites in the hill country of Judah bears the *lmlk* inscription above the emblem, whereas the lower register remained blank (Type XII). Forty or 41 stamp impressions of this type were discovered: 20 at Ramat Raḥel, nine at Mizpah, six or seven in Jerusalem, six at Gibeon and one at Tell el-Fûl.²⁸ No stamp impressions of this type have been found at sites in the Shephelah of Judah, or at sites destroyed in the course of Sennacherib's campaign.²⁹

To sum up, our analysis encompassed about 280 *lmlk* stamp impressions, which fell into three different categories: Types IIb, IIc and XII. None of these stamp impressions was found at sites destroyed in the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE, and some of them were clearly assigned to 7th century levels. Most of these types also appear in the Shephelah of Judah, but in very small numbers. It seems possible that the 280 *lmlk* stamp impressions presented here were all stamped after 701 BCE and retained the *lmlk* administrative/distribution system during the early 7th century.³⁰

²⁵ Pritchard (1959: 24, No. 145, Fig. 9: 145); Magen 2008: 41. See data collected by Garena at http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_nasbeh.htm; http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_hebron.htm.

²⁶ For the stamp impressions discovered at Mizpah, see: McCown 1947: 161. Garena identified another specimen of this type (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_nasbeh.htm). For the other stamp impressions of this type, see Macalister 1912: 14, Fig. 361: 1; Aharoni 1964: 62–63, Pl. 39: 11; Lapp 1981: 111, Pl. 28: 8–9; Avigad and Barkay 2000: No. 17 on pp. 252, 260.

²⁷ Pritchard 1959: 75, Nos. 79, 481, 501; McCown 1947: 161; Nadelman 1989: 131, 134, No. 26, Photo 156. For the stamp impressions found at Gezer, see the data collected by Garena at http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_gezer.htm.

²⁸ See Sergi forthcoming a, forthcoming b; Pritchard 1959: 25, Nos. 75, 412, 414, 453; Sinclair 1960: 32, Pl. 166: 3; Avigad and Barkay 2000: Nos. 24–26 pp. 252, 261; Shoham 2000: 76, Nos. 29–30, Pl. 2: 29–30. On the nine stamp impressions discovered at Mizpah, see the data collected by Garena at http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_nasbeh.htm. Garena also identified two more stamp impressions of this type from Gibeon, one from the Jewish Quarter (although this is not certain), one from Duncan and Macalister's excavations in the Ophel, and one more excavated there by Kenyon (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_jerusalem.htm).

²⁹ One stamp impression of this type was discovered at Ashdod (Dothan 1971: 83), but since it was found outside the boundaries of the Kingdom of Judah and came from an unclear stratigraphy, it is not relevant to the current discussion.

³⁰ Needless to say, if future excavations of clear late 8th century BCE archaeological contexts at Shephelah sites yield even a single stamp impression of a type dated by us to the 7th century, this type will need to be removed from the 7th-century group.

TABLE 1

Summary of 7th Century *lmlk* Stamp Impressions by Type and Site

Site	I Ib					I Ic					XII	Grand total
	Z	H	M	S	Total	Z	H	M	S	Total		
Jerusalem	20	25	12	4	61	1	0	1	0	2	7	70
Ramat Raḥel	34	22	19	5	80	0	1	1	0	2	18	100
Gibeon	11	16	7	10	44	3	0	1	0	4	4	52
Mizpah	4	5	3	3	15	1	1	1	0	3	9	27
Other sites	5	10	6	3	24	1	2	2	0	5	2	31
Total	74	78	47	25	224	6	4	6	0	16	40	280

Typological development of the *lmlk* stamp impressions

The observation that some types of *lmlk* stamp impressions are later than 701 BCE enables us to further define their typological development. All the four-winged types, as well as all the variants of the IIa two-winged types, were found in the Lachish III destruction level. These types should therefore be dated to the late 8th century BCE. However, there are far fewer Type IIa two-winged stamp impressions than there are of the various four-winged types: only 30 two-winged Type IIa handles were discovered at Lachish as compared to 348 four-winged stamp impressions. This ratio also appears to apply to the overall number of two-winged Type IIa impressions (approximately 158 items were discovered in excavations and surveys) as compared to the four-winged stamp impressions (approximately 507) that are dated to the same period.³¹ Since the four-winged types do not persist into the 7th century, we suggest that they are earlier and were in use for a longer period than the IIa two-winged types.³² These were possibly in use for a short while before Sennacharib's campaign, and were replaced after 701 BCE by the IIb two-winged types.³³

³¹ Vaughn (1999: 166, 185–197) listed a total of 1716 *lmlk* stamp impressions, 1361 of which were found in documented excavations. These numbers were recently updated by Garena (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_corp.htm), who listed 2158 *lmlk* stamp impressions, 1440 of which have been found in documented excavations.

³² See already the assumption of Tushingham 1992 (as described above, Note 2). Besides the archaeological evidence for the seniority of the four-winged types of *lmlk* stamp impressions over the two-winged types, we may also assume that the four-winged emblem was earlier than the two-winged in Judah. This is due to the wide distribution of the scarab symbol in the glyptic finds, compared with the low distribution of the winged sun disc (Sass 1993: 214). Furthermore, the four-winged scarab is associated with Egypt, whose culture was probably more dominant in Judah before the arrival of the Assyrians (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 276; Oman 2005: 231–234).

³³ Ussishkin (1976: 12) has noted that in cases where private stamp impressions were found together with *lmlk* stamp impressions, they were of the IIa types: two at Lachish and two at Tell Beit Mirsim (also 2004c: 2142–2143). Nevertheless, one private stamp impression was found at the Western Hill in Jerusalem next to a four-winged type (Avigad and Barkay 2000: 248–249, No. 54).

The most common 7th century *lmlk* types (228 stamped handles of the IIB types) maintained the basic pattern of the various 8th century types, which included the *lmlk* inscription in the upper register, the two-winged sun disc emblem in the centre and the place name in the lower register. This tri-partite pattern changed in the later types, leading us to conclude, although we do not have unequivocal archaeological proof, that the legend by this time had lost its significance. In 16 of the Type IIC stamp impressions the emblem remained unchanged while the place name appeared in the upper register and *lmlk* did not appear at all. In the 40 Type XII stamp impressions the legend consisted of *lmlk* only. This tendency continued into the middle of the 7th century BCE and onward, by which time the royal stamp impression system consisted of emblems only: either concentric circles or rosettes.³⁴ The legends had disappeared entirely.

Administrative importance of main Judahite sites according to *lmlk* types found

The administrative importance of the main Judahite sites that yielded the largest number of *lmlk* stamp impressions (Lachish, Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel, Gibeon and Mizpah) may be deduced from the types of *lmlk* stamp impressions discovered there, according to the dating system suggested above.

Three hundred seventy-eight stamp impressions dated to the 8th century BCE were found at Lachish (348 are of the four-winged types and 30 of the two-winged Type IIA). This is almost 92% of the total number of 413 *lmlk* stamp impressions discovered at the site, but since 31 stamp impressions from Lachish are unclassified, the number of 8th century stamp impressions is actually 99% of the total recognizable finds (Ussishkin 2004c: 2135–2138; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2151–2159). Only four *lmlk* stamp impressions from Lachish may be safely dated to the 7th century (Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 68; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2152, 2158, Nos. 41, 44, 315).

Unfortunately, we do not have a complete data set of the *lmlk* stamp impressions from Jerusalem; many are not yet published, or are published without the necessary details. As far as we can tell, more than 285 *lmlk* stamp impressions have been found in Jerusalem, but only 100 of them can be safely identified and dated—30 to the 8th century and 70 to the 7th.³⁵ Assuming that this ratio is also valid for the remainder of the finds, we conclude that Jerusalem yielded approximately 90 *lmlk* stamp impressions dated to the 8th century and about 180 dated to the 7th century.

³⁴ The concentric circles beside two-winged impressions appeared before and during the middle of the 7th century, when the concentric incision on royal Judahite jar handles was in use (Parayre 1993: 9, 18, 38–42). This may indicate a link between the two-winged sun disc and the concentric circles, and in any case it seems that the incision of concentric circles on jar handles (some of them with *lmlk* stamp impressions) was part of the adaptation of the *lmlk* system to a new system. On the date of the rosette-stamped handles, see Ussishkin 2004b; Koch 2008.

³⁵ See the discussion above, and see also Avigad and Barkay 2000: Nos. 9–24, 30–32, p. 252; Shoham 2000: 76, Nos. 8–10, 12–15, 17–26, 29–30. According to the data that was available to Barkay (1985: 406, 424), 235 of 254 *lmlk* stamp impressions from Jerusalem (92%) are of the two-winged sun disc types.

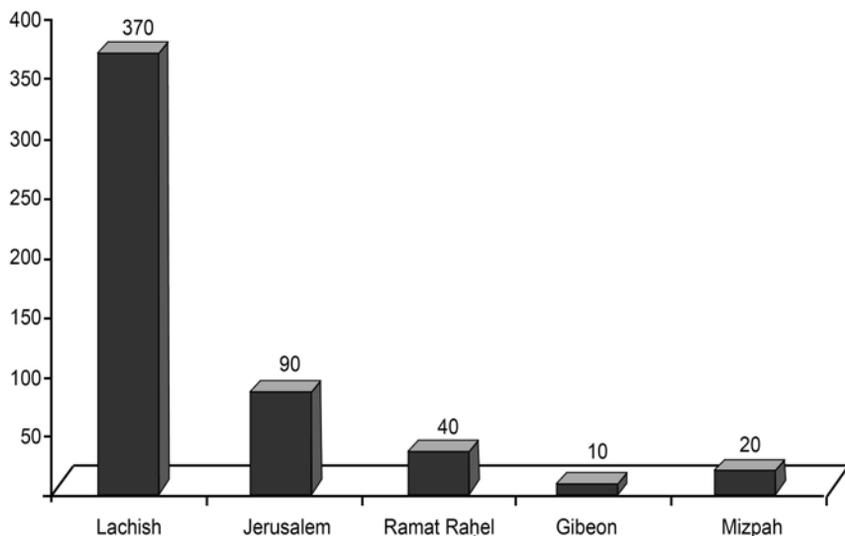


FIGURE 3 The five main Judahite sites where 8th century BCE *lmlk* stamp impressions were found.

One hundred eighty-four *lmlk* stamp impressions have been discovered thus far at Ramat Raḥel, but 42 of them cannot be classified. Only 40 stamp impressions are dated to the 8th century (28% of the total recognizable finds) as against 102 dated to the 7th century (72%) (Sergi forthcoming a, forthcoming b).

In Gibeon, 92 *lmlk* stamp impressions were discovered, but the exact type of 16 of them cannot be determined. Fifty-nine *lmlk* stamp impressions can be dated to the 7th century (78% of the total recognizable finds), while only 17 stamp impressions are dated to the 8th century (22%, and see Pritchard 1959: 23–26).

In Mizpah, 88 *lmlk* stamp impressions were uncovered, but the exact type of 29 of them cannot be determined. Thirty-four stamp impressions can be dated to the 7th century (58% of the total recognizable finds), while 25 can be dated to the 8th century (42%).³⁶

The conclusions from the above data are that during the late 8th century BCE, Lachish was the main centre of the *lmlk* administration. Other important sites during this period, but lagging far behind Lachish, were Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel and Beth-Shemesh. However, none of these sites yielded more than 20% of the number of stamped handles discovered at Lachish. Since Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel were not destroyed in the Sennacherib onslaught, and as the stamped jars could have been in continuous use long after 701 BCE, the status of Lachish prior to this date seems all the more prominent. In the 7th century BCE Lachish was no longer a part of the kingdom's administrative system, nor were other sites in the Shephelah. Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel became the main administrative *lmlk* centres in Judah, together with Gibeon and Mizpah.

³⁶ McCown 1947: 161. See data collected by Garena (http://www.lmlk.com/research/lmlk_nasbeh.htm).

The majority of the 8th century *mlk* stamp impressions were discovered in the Shephelah (about 80%, mainly at Lachish),³⁷ reflecting the demographic, economic and administrative strength of this area in the second half of the 8th century. The relatively small number of the early *mlk* types in and around Jerusalem, even at a time when the capital was at its demographic peak and was the largest and richest city in Judah (Na'aman 2007; Finkelstein 2008; Geva 2008: 55–56 with further literature), and when the territory surrounding it flourished (Katz 2008: 171–178 with further literature), highlights the importance of the Shephelah in the Judahite economy and administration in the late 8th century.

Sennacherib's campaign inflicted a severe military and economic blow on Judah and led to a dramatic demographic decline, mainly in the Shephelah (Blakely and Hardin 2002; Finkelstein and Na'aman 2004, and cf. Faust 2008). By the beginning of the 7th century BCE, the once densely populated area had become sparsely settled (Dagan 2004) and was no longer the economic, demographic and administrative force it had once been. The distribution of the late *mlk* types reflects this situation. The overwhelming majority of 7th century BCE *mlk* stamp impressions was found at sites located in the hill country. Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel replaced Lachish as the main *mlk* administrative centres, and other sites around Jerusalem, primarily Gibeon and Mizpah, became important centres as well. The concentration of 7th century BCE *mlk* stamp impressions around Jerusalem indicates that the collection, storage and distribution centre of the Judahite jars had shifted from the Shephelah of Judah to Jerusalem and its environs.

The Assyrian destruction and the economic damage caused by the loss of large territories in the Shephelah, as well as the sharp demographic decline, are also attested in the total number of the *mlk* stamp impressions. Only 19% of the corpus can be dated to the 7th century BCE.

The jolt inflicted by the change in the status of the Shephelah was probably also the reason for the striking change in the place names in the *mlk* corpus. Most of the stamp impressions from the 7th century bear the place name *hbrn* (78 of Type IIIb and four of Type IIIc, totalling some 29% of this late group) or *zyp* (74 of Type ZIIb and six of Type ZIIc, about 28% of the late group of *mlk* stamp impressions). The third most common place name is *mmšt* (47 stamp impressions of Type MIIb and six of Type MIIc, about 19% of the late group), and the name least common is *šwkh* (25 stamp impressions of Type SIIb and not even one of Type IIc, altogether about 9% of the late group of *mlk* stamp impressions). Forty stamp impressions (14% of the late group of *mlk* stamp impressions) are of Type XII, which bears no place name.

These numbers differ from the 8th century *mlk* types, in which the place name *šwkh* is more common than *zyp* and *mmšt*, and as Na'aman noted long ago (1986: 14), 75%

³⁷ This comparison is methodologically problematic, since it is based on finds sealed under destruction layers (especially Level III at Lachish) and finds from sites that continued to exist undisturbed into the 7th century BCE. Theoretically, there could have been many more 8th century BCE stamped jars in Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel that disappeared and/or dispersed over the years. However, the low numbers of these 8th century stamped jar handles at sites outside the Shephelah and their total absence from clear post-701 strata is sufficient indication for conducting this comparison.

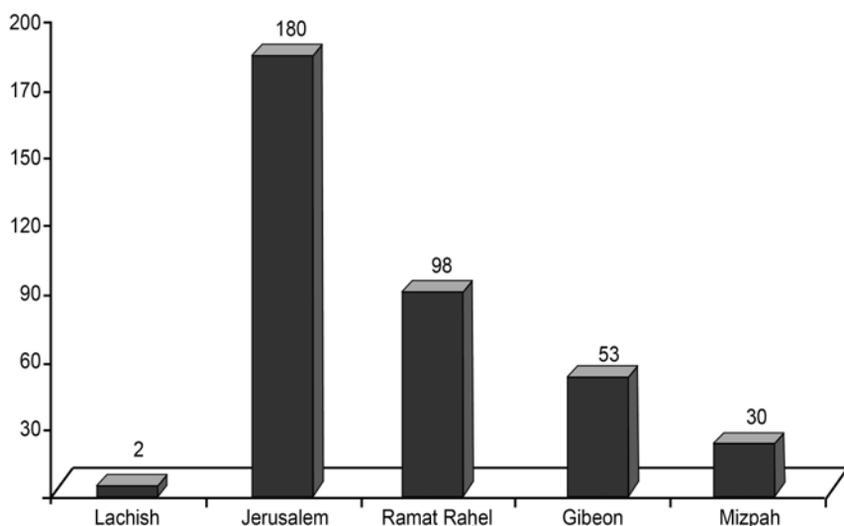


FIGURE 4 The five main Judahite sites where 7th century BCE *lmlk* stamp impressions were found.

of the *šwkh* stamp impressions were discovered in the Shephelah. The changed status of Socoh supports the accepted suggestion of locating the site at Khirbet ‘Abbād in the Valley of Elah, an area destroyed in the Assyrian campaign (Na’aman 1986: 16, and cf. Kletter 2002: 138–141).³⁸

As for *mmšt*, Na’aman (1991: 26–27) estimated that its absence from the list of cities in Joshua 15, dated to the late 7th century, attests to its destruction in the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE. However, in view of the fact that this site is well represented in the 7th century group of *lmlk* stamp impressions (its distribution even grew in comparison with the 8th century), its absence from the Joshua 15 list may indicate that it was not an ordinary village (contra the basic assumption of many scholars; see, e.g., Barkay 2006: 43), but rather a royal estate growing agricultural produce for the local administration, well away from any known city (Fox 2000: 227–235) in a new, formerly unsettled area such as the Rephaim Valley.³⁹

³⁸ This new data further weakens Rainey’s suggestion (1982: 59) of identifying Socoh with Khirbet Shuweikeh in the southern hill country of Judah. (See already the arguments of Na’aman 1986: 12.)

³⁹ Most scholars have been trying to locate this place north of Jerusalem, mainly because of the distribution of the jar handles bearing its name (Welten 1969: 147–156; Lemaire 1975a; Na’aman 1986: 15). Ginsberg (1948: 20–21) proposed that it is an abbreviation of ממשלה (“government”), which is an administrative designation for Jerusalem, and Barkay (2006: 43) took this idea a step further and suggested, without any linguistic or other support, identifying *mmšt* with Ramat Raḥel.

The date of the private stamp impressions and their connection to the *lmlk* stamp impressions

As stated above, the system of private stamp impressions is an essential part of the *lmlk* system, and the chronological overlapping of the two is obvious from both the archaeological and typological standpoints. In order to determine the time span in which the private stamp impressions were in use, we must examine their distribution at Judahite sites and compare this to the general *lmlk* distribution.

The 43 types of private stamp impressions known thus far from excavations and surveys were classified according to the different variants of the personal names. They may be divided into three geographical groups:

- From Level III at Lachish.
- From other sites in the Shephelah of Judah destroyed during Sennacherib's campaign (701 BCE).
- From sites not destroyed during Sennacherib's campaign that carried on into the 7th century, mainly in the hill country of Judah, especially Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel.

Twenty-two of the 43 types of private stamp impressions were discovered at Lachish, mostly in the Level III destruction layer, but also on the surface (the impressions *lnḥm/ḥbdy*, *ltnḥm/mgn* and *lšlm/ḥʔm*). One type (*lsmk.b/n.spnyhw*) was found on the surface at Lachish, but the same type of stamp impression was also discovered at Tel Goded, where there are no finds from the 7th century. Two others (*mšlm/ḥltn* and *lnḥm/ḥšlyhw*) were discovered on the surface at Lachish, but identical stamp impressions are known only at the City of David and Gibeon, where no destruction levels dated to 701 BCE have been found, and in this case it is not clear if these two types date from the late 8th century. However, since all the other types of private stamp impressions discovered at Lachish were clearly dated to Level III, and since there is not even one type of private stamp impression that can be assigned to Level II at this site, or to a clear 7th century archaeological context anywhere, we can assume that these two types came from Level III as well, and should be dated to the late 8th century.

TABLE 2

'Private' Stamp Impressions from Level III at Lachish

Type	No. Stamp Impressions	Other Sites Where Type Found	References
1 ḥzyh/w.tnḥm	1	Beth-Shemesh; Mizpah; Ramat Raḥel	Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 78 and Fig. 29.16: 1; Barkay and Vaughn 1996: 44–46, No. 17 and Figs. 20–21; McCown 1947: 162 and Pl. 57: 10; Lipschits 2008.
2 ḥʔ/tnḥm ⁴⁰	1	–	Ussishkin 2004c: 2138 No. 91.
3 hwšʕ/špn	4	Gezer; Khirbet 'Abbād; Tel Goded	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 119–122 and Pl. 56: 20, 30; Macalister 1912: 211 and Fig. 360; Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 3; Vaughn 1999: 200, No. 23; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2160.

⁴⁰ As they are impressed on the same jar, Vaughn (1999: 97, n. 56) considered this stamp impression and the previous one (No. 1 in the table) as belonging to the same person.

TABLE 2 (cont.)

'Private' Stamp Impressions from Level III at Lachish

Type	No. Stamp Impressions	Other Sites Where Type Found	References	
4	yhwyl/šhr	1	–	Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 80 and Fig. 29.14: 4.
5	yhwł/šhr	1	Ramat Raḥel	Aharoni 1962: 44 and Fig. 31: 2, Pl. 27: 2; Ussishkin 2004c: 2137, No. 79.
6	krmy/ypyhw	2	Jerusalem	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 7; Vaughn 1999: 203, No. 55.
7	lmnhm/ ywbnh	4	Gibeon; Ramat Raḥel; Adullam; Khirbet 'Abbād	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 6; Pritchard 1959: 28, Fig. 10: 7 and Pl. 11: 7; Aharoni 1962: 17–18, Fig. 14.3 and Pl. 6: 4; Barkay and Vaughn 1996: 36–38, Nos. 7–9; Vaughn 1999: 204, No. 60 and No. 62.
8	mšlm/ʔhmlk	12	–	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47A: 4; Ussishkin 2004c: 2137 No. 81 and Fig. 29.14: 2; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2162–2163.
9	lmšlm/ʔlntn	1	Gibeon	Tufnell 1953: 341; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2162; Pritchard 1959: 28, Fig. 10: 5, 6 and Pl. 11: 5, 6.
10	lnhm/hšlyhw	1	Gibeon; Jerusalem; Ramat Raḥel	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 3; Pritchard 1959: 27, Fig. 10: 2 and Pl. 11: 2; Nadelman 1989: 131; ⁴¹ Aharoni 1964: 61.
11	lnhm/ʔbdy	13	Tel Goded; Naḥal 'Arugot	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 120; Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47A: 10, 11; Hadas 1983; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2163.
12	lnr/šbnʔ	1	Beth-Shemesh; Jerusalem	Vaughn 1999: 208 no. 130; Avigad and Barkay 2000: 247–248, No. 51; Ussishkin 2004c: 2138 No. 84 Fig. 29.16: 2.
13	lsmk.b/n. spnyhw	3	Tel Goded; Jerusalem	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 120 and Pl. 6: 25; Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 8, 9; Vaughn 1999: 209, No. 140.
14	lʔbd/y	1	–	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47A: 8.
15	spn.ʕ/zryhw	5	–	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47A: 1, 2; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2164.
16	lspn/ʕzr	3	–	Tufnell 1953: 110; Barkay and Vaughn 1996: 44, No. 14 and Fig. 17; Ussishkin 2004c: 85 and Fig. 29.16: 3.
17	lšbn/ʔ.šhr	3	Mizpah; Ramat Raḥel	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 1; McCown 1947: 160–162; Aharoni 1964: 60; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2164.
18	šbnyh/ʕzryh	1	Tel Goded	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 120; Tufnell 1953: 341; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2161.
19	lšwk/y.šbn/ʔ	2	–	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 2.

⁴¹ Nadelman (1989: 131), on the basis of its similarity to a bulla published by Shiloh (1986), dated the stamp impression from Jerusalem to the second half of the 7th century or the beginning of the 6th. We accept neither the similarity nor the date.

TABLE 2 (cont.)

'Private' Stamp Impressions from Level III at Lachish

Type	No. Stamp Impressions	Other Sites Where Type Found	References
20 lšlm/ʔhʔ	1	Arad; Beth-Shemesh; Jerusalem; Kh. Rabud; Ramat Rahel; Tel Goded	Ben-Dor 1948: 66–67; Kochavi 1974: 18, Pl. 4: 3–4; Vaughn 1999: 214, Nos. 195, 196, 197, 201, 214; Ussishkin 2004c: 2138 no. 90.
21 lšlm/ʔhʔm	4	Kh. Qila	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47B: 2; Hizmi and Shabbtai 1991: 170 Fig. 188; Barkay and Vaughn 1996: 38–41 No. 10 Figs. 11, 13.
22 ltnhm/mgn	7	Gibeon; Ramat Rahel; Tel ʿErani; Tekoa	Tufnell 1953: 341 and Pl. 47A: 7; Pritchard 1959: 28, Fig. 10: 8 and Pl. 11: 8; Aharoni 1964: 32; Ofer 1993: 95; Vaughn 1999: 215 No. 217; Ussishkin 2004c: 2138 Nos. 86, 87 and Fig. 29.16: 4.

TABLE 3

'Private' Stamp Impressions from Shephelah of Judah Sites Destroyed Concurrently with Lachish Level III

Type	No. Stamp Impressions	Destruction Levels in Shephelah of Judah	Other Sites Where Type Found	References
23 ʔlyqm.nʔ/r.ykn	1 2	Beth-Shemesh Tell Beit Mirsim	Ramat Rahel	Grant and Wright 1939: 80; Vaughn 1999: 199; Albright 1932: Nos. 623, 860; Aharoni 1964: 33, Fig. 37: 6 and Pl. 40: 4.
24 lbky/šlm	1	Beth-Shemesh	Horvat Šovav	Grant and Wright 1939: 82; Vaughn 1999: 200; Rahmani 1969: 82 and Pl. 20: 1.
25 bnʔy/yhwkl	1 2	Maresha Tell eš-Šafi	–	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 121 and Pl. 56: 27.
26 lhšdʔ/yrmyh	1	Beth-Shemesh	–	Grant and Wright 1939: 80; Vaughn 1999: 201.
27 lkšʔ/zkʔ	2	Beth-Shemesh	–	Grant and Wright 1939: 84; Barkay and Vaughn 1996: 33–34 Nos. 4–5 and Figs. 3–4.
28 mnhm/wyhbnh	1	Beth-Shemesh	Ramat Rahel	Grant and Wright 1939: 81–82; Aharoni 1956: 145.

TABLE 3 (cont.)

‘Private’ Stamp Impressions from Shephelah of Judah Sites Destroyed
Concurrently with Lachish Level III

	Type	No. Stamp Impressions	Destruction Levels in Shephelah of Judah	Other Sites Where Type Found	References
29	mnhm/ybnh	1	Tel Goded	Jerusalem	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 120; Avigad and Barkay 2000: 249–250.
30	ʿzr/hgy	1	Azekah	Gezer	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 121; Macalister 1912: 211.
31	lsdq/smk	1	Beth-Shemesh	–	Grant and Wright 1939: 83.
32	lspn.ʿ/bmʿs	1 1 2	Azekah Tel Batash Tell es-Safi	Jerusalem	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 121; Kelm and Mazar 2001: 194, No. 10; Vaughn 1999: 211 Nos. 158, 160; Avigad and Barkay 2000: 249.
33	spn/ʿzr	1	Beth-Shemesh	–	Grant and Wright 1939: 80–81
34	šbnyhw/ ʿzryhw	3	Tel Goded	–	Bliss and Macalister 1902: 120.
35	ltnh/m.ngb	2	Beth-Shemesh	Gibeon; Jerusalem; Ramat Rahel	Grant and Wright 1939: 83; Barkay and Vaughn 1996: 46–48, No. 24 and Fig. 19; Pritchard 1959: 28, Fig. 10: 3 and Pl. 11: 3; Vaughn 1999: 216, No. 234; Aharoni 1964: 44, Fig. 31: 1 and Pl. 27: 3.

According to the typology presented above, we can date 35 types of private stamp impressions (out of 43 known) with high probability to the late 8th century BCE. The remaining eight were discovered only at sites located in the hill country. However, five of the eight contain names (both personal and patronymic) that also appear on stamp impressions from Lachish Level III, very probably pre-dating the Sennacherib campaign.

Three names, *hwšm/hgy*, *hšyʿlšmʿ* and *lšmḥʿlšmʿ*, were discovered in Jerusalem or Ramat Rahel without any parallel at Lachish or another Shephelah of Judah site. Being three out of 43 types, they may be assumed to also date to the late 8th century BCE, the single stamp impression of each type to have merely survived longer. In any case,

we can conclude that, unlike the *mlk* stamp impressions, no private stamp impression was discovered in a clear 7th century BCE archaeological context.⁴²

Unlike the *mlk* stamp impressions, found in equal numbers in the Shephelah of Judah and in the northern hill country of Judah and the Benjamin region, the main concentration of the private stamp impressions is in the Shephelah of Judah: 132 out of 187 that have a known origin (about 70%).⁴³ Only 51 were discovered in Jerusalem and its environs.⁴⁴ Only one was found at Arad (Vaughn 1999: 214). Furthermore, since private stamp impressions represent only about 15% of the entire corpus of *mlk* stamp impressions, it is reasonable to assume that the private system was in use for a much shorter time.⁴⁵ The unique nature of private stamp impressions on the royal Judahite jars combined with their limited duration before Sennacherib's campaign, their distribution mainly in the Shephelah of Judah and their relative scarcity (1:7 in proportion to the *mlk* stamp impressions), lead to the hypothesis that the private stamp impression system was adopted for a short period by the administrative and economic system of the *mlk* stamp impressions, and was used as part of the preparations for the Assyrian onslaught.

In contrast to Na'aman (1986: 16–17), who ascribed the entire *mlk* stamp impression system to Judah's preparations for the Assyrian campaign, we suggest that in terms of time and place only the private stamp impression system fits this purpose. For a short while the private stamp impression system replaced the *mlk* system, the latter having evolved post-720 BCE as part of the changes in the local economy and administration after Judah became an Assyrian vassal. Following the Assyrian campaign, the private stamp impression system disappeared, while the *mlk* system continued to develop, with the necessary changes caused by the massive Assyrian destruction.

⁴² A stamp impression bearing the legend *nr*², discovered at En-Gedi (Stern 2007: 161, with further literature) deserves special attention. Contrary to Barkay (1995: 45) and Vaughn (1999: 209), we do not consider this exemplar a private stamp impression. Not only should the date of this stamped handle be late 7th century (Stern 2007: 162), but it consists of only a private name without a patronymic (unlike all the other private stamp impressions). In any case, there is no reason to identify this *nr*² from En-Gedi with the well known *nr*² (son of) *šbn*² (cf. above, no. 12 in Table 2, with further literature), and there are many morphological differences between the motif of this stamp impression and the 'classic' two-winged stamp impressions dated to the late 8th century. The En-Gedi exemplar is very similar to other late 7th–early 6th century appearances of the winged disc motif (Parayre 1993: 37–38), and one can see it as a unique combination of a late private stamp impression together with a major motif from the royal seals.

⁴³ Seventy-three private stamp impressions were found at Lachish (Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2171), 16 at Tel Goded (Bliss and Macalister 1902: 119–120; Ben-Dor 1948: 66–67; Gibson 1994: 203–204, 208) and 15 at Beth-Shemesh (Grant and Wright 1939: 80–84; Barkay and Vaughn 2004: 2167).

⁴⁴ Of the 51 private stamp impressions from around Jerusalem, 19 were found in Jerusalem itself (Barkay 1985: 412–413; Tushingham 1985: Pl. 69: 13; Nadelman 1989: 131; Vaughn 1999: 217; Avigad and Barkay 2000: 247–250; Shoham 2000: 82–83) and 18 in Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1956: 154; 1962: 18–19, 44; 1964: 32–33, 61; Lipschits 2008).

⁴⁵ The *lnr*²/*šbn*² stamp impression from Ramat Raḥel seems to deserve further discussion concerning the date of the private stamp impressions, since it was stamped next to an IIIb *mlk* stamp impression on the same handle. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the stamp and the fact that it was the only stamp impression stamped on the same handle with a late type of *mlk* stamp impression, make it exceptional.

TABLE 4

‘Private’ Stamp Impressions from Sites Not Destroyed during Sennacherib’s Campaign (Impressions Not paralleled in the Shephelah of Judah)

	Type	No. Stamp Impressions	Site Where Discovered	References
36	hwšm/hgy	1	Jerusalem	Nadelman 1989: 88.
37	hšy/ʔlšm ^c	1	Jerusalem	Shoham 2000: 82, No. P2.
38	lhšy/ʔlšm ^c	1	Ramat Rahel	Aharoni 1962: 18–19, Fig. 14: 4 and Pl. 6: 1.
39	lyhwhyl/šhr	1 2	Jerusalem Ramat Rahel	Tushingham 1985: Pl. 69: 13; Aharoni 1962: 44, Fig. 31: 2, Pl. 27: 2; 1964: 32–33, Fig. 37: 1 and Pl. 40: 1.
40	ln ^ʔ /šbn ^ʔ	1	Ramat Rahel	Aharoni 1962: 16, Fig. 14: 2 and Pl. 6: 2.
41	lnry.b/n. šbnyhw	1	Jerusalem	Avigad and Barkay 2000: 248–249, No. 54.
42	lspn/zryhw	1 1	Ramat Rahel Gibeon	Pritchard 1959: 28, Fig. 10: 4 and Pl. 11: 4; Aharoni 1962: 44.
43	lsmh/ʔlšm	1	Ramat Rahel	Lipschits forthcoming.

Conclusions

This paper challenges the traditional convention that dates *lmlk* stamp impressions to the period between 704–701 BCE and interprets them as part of Judah’s preparations for the impending Assyrian campaign. We propose a broader chronological scope and suggest an earlier dating for the initial use of the *lmlk* stamp impressions—some time after 732 BCE, linking it to other changes in the economy and administration of Judah, when it became an Assyrian vassal kingdom. Although our historical reconstruction cannot as yet be underpinned archaeologically, it is consistent with other administrative, economic and technological changes that took place in Judah during this period. It accords better with the complexity of the *lmlk* system, the many seals used during its early phase, and the distribution of the many stamped handles than does the common assumption about its role during the short period between 704 and 701 BCE as part of the preparations for the looming Assyrian assault.

With this in mind, the limited time span during which the private stamp impressions were in use, which did not exceed the 701 BCE Assyrian campaign, becomes significant. The limited distribution of the private stamp impressions (mainly at sites located in the Shephelah of Judah), their small number (approximately one-seventh of the entire corpus of *lmlk* stamp impressions) and their limited duration, together with the fact that the private stamp impressions appear to be associated with the *lmlk* stamp impressions, support the assumption that it was they that were used in preparation for the Sennacherib campaign in the years 704–701 BCE.

The *lmlk* stamp impression system continued to exist after the Sennacherib campaign, at the beginning of the 7th century, though on a smaller scale than previously. This proposal

is well founded archaeologically. Aside from the many jars stamped prior to the 701 BCE Assyrian campaign that remained in use, especially at sites not destroyed, new *lmlk* stamp impression types were discovered mainly in the hill country, and only at sites not destroyed during the Assyrian campaign, or built during the 7th century; they had no counterpart in Lachish Level III or its equivalent strata at other Shephelah sites.

The late *lmlk* types, dated to the beginning of the 7th century BCE, are the ‘missing link’ in the series of stamped handles that began with the early (late 8th century) *lmlk* stamp impressions and ended with the rosette stamp impressions of the late 7th and early 6th century BCE. The incised concentric circles (132 items, alongside *lmlk* stamp impressions) were an independent system, interim between the late *lmlk* and the rosette types.

According to the typology suggested in this paper, the many different four-winged *lmlk* types are the earliest, with the IIa two-winged types appearing before the 701 BCE campaign and the various IIb types added post-701 BCE. It can be assumed that the system continued to develop with the IIc types (place name in register above emblem, no *lmlk*), and Type XII (*lmlk* with no place name). In both cases the legend seems to have lost its significance, a tendency that continued towards the middle of the 7th century BCE, with the incised concentric circles and later on, during the second half of that century, with the non-epigraphic rosette system.

Throughout this period, royal jars continued to be manufactured in the Shephelah of Judah, and some were stamped with a royal emblem. However, after 701 BCE, and because of the dire effect of the Sennacherib campaign on the Shephelah, a distinct change can be seen in the distribution of the stamp impressions. Lachish lost its place as the main administrative centre. Socoh, the most popular place name in the early *lmlk* types, became the least popular in the late types, and there is a sharp decline in the number of *lmlk* stamp impressions from sites in the Shephelah of Judah. The jolt sustained by this very important agricultural area of the Shephelah region probably affected the total number of stamped jars. In each of the 7th century types of stamped handles—the later *lmlk*, concentric circles and rosette types—the amount of impressions is never greater than 20% of the number of the early *lmlk* types. In any case, throughout the 7th century BCE the hill country became the main (almost the only) area where royal jars were distributed. Ramat Raḥel and Jerusalem were the main administrative centres of the 7th century BCE types, followed by Mizpah and Gibeon.

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