

Stamp seals from the Southern Levant: a multi-faceted prism for studying entangled histories in an interdisciplinary perspective

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The project addresses stamp seals, a common but highly valued and multi-functional artefact class, as a privileged media to study various aspects of ancient Levantine social, economic, cultural and religious history especially in pre-Hellenistic times. Its core aim is to develop an online open-access, collaborative and expandable database entitled *Corpus of Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant (CSSL)* as a sustainable reference tool for future research in several disciplines: archaeology, ancient history, biblical studies, history of religion(s), Mediterranean studies, and others including exact sciences.

Taking its starting-point from groundbreaking research initiated since the 1970s by Othmar Keel, particularly through his *Corpus of Stamp-Seal Amulets from Palestine/Israel (CSSPI)* and the *Corpus of Seal Amulets from Jordan (CSAJ)*, the project will bring that unfinished task to completion while fully engaging the Digital Humanities transition. All relevant data will be translated from a pre-digital format into a digitized research infrastructure. Fulfilling latest Open Access requirements, the new database will allow for active contributions by all interested scholars worldwide. Conceived to be easily updated and expanded, it will remain operative for decades to come.

CSSPI's focus will be extended to wider regional concerns by removing modern borders from historical considerations: While "Southern Levant" designates the territories covered by the territories of present-day Israel, Jordan, and Palestine, CSSL will be so designed that it can easily be enlarged to integrate additional data from sites lying beyond that region, e.g., in the Central and Northern Levant, the Egyptian delta, or the Arabian peninsula.

A particular aim of the project is to increase the value of the data by interdisciplinary cooperation involving the specialized expertise of an international network of scholars and institutions. The full and best currently available documentation will allow senior scholars, postdocs and PhD students of several disciplines (archaeology, biblical studies, history of religion(s) and three universities (Bern, Tel Aviv, Zurich) to conduct a series of innovative studies. The latter will, for example, explore seal designs and their iconography as a resource for religio-historical investigation; questions of social archaeology will be studied alongside matters of political and economic history; gender history, social archaeology and biblical studies will intersect in a study of seal use by



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women. We want to draw on the full potential of the glyptic material to develop new approaches both to the history of ancient Levantine society, culture, and religion, and to the study of biblical texts. Last but not least, a crucial aim is to bring the study of ancient glyptics into conversation with scientists. An overall concern of the project is to transmit established expertise and encourage a new generation of scholars to pursue, consolidate and renew the study of ancient glyptics as a key medium for understanding historical entanglements in the Southern Levant.

PROJECT MODULES

	Research positions and location*	Duration (months)
A Digital Humanities module: creating the CSSL database Dr. Ben Greet (UZH), Dr. Tatjana Beuthe (UBE), Inbar Meyerson (TAU)	Postdocs UZH, UBE Computing TAU	2x48
B Honoring CSSPI, moving forward to CSSL (includes final publication of CSSPI vols. VI–VII)		
C Exploring production, diffusion, and circulation—with a view on iconography		
C1 – Production and diffusion; group characteristics and workshop issues	Workshops	
C2 – Local and regional profiles and traditions: assessment and comparison (Dr. Nadia Ben-Marzouk)	Postdoc TAU/UZH	36
C3 – The distribution of stamp seal motifs in the Southern Levant (2022/23, to be advertised in spring 2021)	Postdoc UBE	24
D Connectivity: CSSL at the crossroads of disciplines		
D1 – Social archaeology: context, function, and consumption (Noa Rantzer M.A.)	PhD TAU/UZH	48
D2 – Political, social and economic history: stamp seals and interconnections (Dr. Giulia Tucci)	Postdoc TAU/UBE	36
D3 – Gender history: seals and sealing in gender-historical perspective (Bruno Biermann M.A.)	PhD UBE/UZH	36
D4 – Biblical studies: assessing “iconographic exegesis” (Dr. Silas Klein Cardoso)	Postdoc UBE/UZH	36
D5 – History of religion(s): new perspectives on the history of ancient Levantine religion(s) in the second and first millennia BCE (2022/23, to be advertised in spring 2021)	Postdoc UZH	24
D6 – CSSL and exact sciences: exploring a new interface	Workshops	
E Decades of change: contextualizing a long-term research project in its history and interdisciplinary ramifications		

* TAU: Tel Aviv University, UBE: University of Bern, UZH: University of Zurich.

CSSPI’s development over almost 50 years reflects tremendous changes in scholarship, whether in terms of technology, methods, theoretical models, or scholarly paradigms. Adding a self-reflective dimension to the project will allow us to historicize our own research, to critically reflect how historical knowledge is framed by the conditions of its production, and evaluate how much our research is embedded in and impacted by changing concerns of society at large.

Project duration: 4 years (January 2020 – December 2023)