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AGE OF EMPIRES

The History and Administration of Judah
in the 8th–2nd Centuries BCE
in Light of the Storage-Jar Stamp Impressions

Oded Lipschits

Storage jars of many shapes and sizes were in widespread use in the ancient world, transporting and storing agricultural products such as wine and oil, crucial to agriculture, economy, trade and subsistence. From the late 8th to the 2nd century BCE, the oval storage jars typical of Judah were often stamped or otherwise marked: in the late 8th and early 7th century BCE with *lmlk* stamp impressions, later in the 7th century with concentric circle incisions or rosette stamp impressions, in the 6th century, after the fall of Jerusalem, with lion stamp impressions, and in the Persian, Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods (late 6th–late 2nd centuries BCE) with *yhwd* stamp impressions. At the same time, several *ad hoc* systems of stamp impressions appeared: “private” stamp impressions were used on the eve of Sennacherib’s campaign, *mwšh* stamp impressions after the destruction of Jerusalem, and *yršlm* impressions after the establishment of the Hasmonean state. While administrative systems that stamped storage jars are known elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the phenomenon in Judah is unparalleled in its scale, variety and continuity, spanning a period of some 600 years without interruption.

This is the first attempt to consider the phenomenon as a whole and to develop a unified theory that would explain the function of these stamp impressions and shed new light on the history of Judah during six centuries of subjugation to the empires that ruled the region—as a vassal kingdom in the age of the Assyrian, Egyptian and Babylonian empires and as a province under successive Babylonian, Persian, Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule.

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Contents

Preface

Introduction: The Importance of the Stamp-Impression System for an Understanding of the History and Administration of Judah in the First and Second Temple Periods

1. Storage-Jar Stamp Impressions in the Ancient Near East
2. The Jar-Stamping Phenomenon in Judah
3. The Stamped Judahite Storage Jars
4. Main Stamp-Impression Types: Typology, Corpus and Distribution
5. The Chronology of the Stamped Storage-Jar Systems in the Kingdom of Judah
6. The Function and *Modus Operandi* of the Stamped Storage-Jar System in the Kingdom of Judah
7. The Stamped Storage-Jar Systems in Their Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Contexts
8. Conclusions

Bibliography

Index of Geographic Names

Index of Historical Figures

Index of Modern Authors