



**IN THE SHADOW OF BYBLOS: THE EARLY BRONZE AGE AEGYPTIACA
FROM TELL FADOUS-KFARABIDA**

Hermann Genz

American University of Beirut

Alexander Ahrens

German Archaeological Institute

ABSTRACT

During the Old Kingdom, Byblos emerged as one of the main ports of trade between Egypt and the Levant. This is not only suggested by Egyptian textual references but also by a surprisingly large number of Egyptian objects dating to the Old Kingdom from Byblos. However, various chronological and contextual problems hugely diminish the value of the Aegyptiaca from Byblos for the reconstruction of the relations between Egypt and the Levantine coast. Excavations at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida undertaken between 2004 and 2016 helped establish a more secure chronology for the Early Bronze Age in Byblos. As the site is only 12 km north of Byblos, it certainly must have been in the economic and political orbit of Byblos. This paper presents the few Aegyptiaca from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida and discusses Tell Fadous-Kfarabida's relationship to Byblos. As Fadous-Kfarabida lacks a good natural harbor, it is very likely that the Aegyptiaca retrieved reached the site via Byblos.

KEYWORDS

Central Levant; Byblos; Tell Fadous-Kfarabida; Old Kingdom; Early Bronze Age

INTRODUCTION

Connections between Egypt and the Levant during the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE have frequently been discussed. It is generally believed that contacts between Egypt and Byblos intensified with the beginning of the Old Kingdom in Egypt (Helck 1971, 21–28; Saghih 1983, 104–106; Wright 1988, 146–152; de Miroschedji 2002, 45–46; Sowada 2009, 7–10; Genz 2014a, 303–304). The notion that Byblos already played a crucial role for trade with Egypt during the 4th millennium (Prag 1986) is based on stylistic comparisons rather than the identification of actual imports (Genz 2014a, 296–297); however, there is growing evidence for contacts between

Egypt and the coast of Northern Lebanon already during the 1st and 2nd Dynasties (Köhler and Ownby 2011; Köhler and Thalmann 2014; Hartung et al. 2015; Iserlis et al. 2019; Sowada et al. 2021).

Egypt was primarily interested in obtaining high-quality timber, notably cedar and other coniferous wood, from Mount Lebanon (Gale et al. 2000, 348–352; Sowada 2009, 194–196), but other tree products such as various resins and oils were of interest as well (Sowada 2009, 198–200). The latter products were transported to Egypt in the so-called combed-ware jars, which are reported in growing frequency from many Old Kingdom sites (Helck 1971, 30–35; Mazzoni 1985; Forstner-Müller and Raue 2008;

Sowada 2009, 155–158; Knoblauch 2010; Forstner-Müller and Raue 2014; Thalmann and Sowada 2014; Sowada et al. 2019).

Egypt, on the other hand, seems to have largely exported luxury objects like stone vessels, a large number of which were found in Byblos (Saghieh 1983, 104–106; Wright 1988, 146–152; Sowada 2009, 130–137). Other objects of Egyptian origin are attested at the site, such as copper axes (Gernez 2011, 239 and Fig. 2) and flint tools (Montet 1928, Pl. LVII, 313; Sowada 2009, 138), which so far have rarely featured in the discussion of relations between Egypt and Byblos.

However, the incomplete publication and the stratigraphic problems associated with most of the Aegyptiaca from Byblos hugely diminish their value for reconstructing the relations between Egypt and the Levant (Saghieh 1983; Wright 1988; Sowada 2009, 139–141).

Another important issue is whether Byblos monopolized the contacts with Egypt during the Old Kingdom or whether other coastal sites in the Central and possibly even Northern Levant also participated in these interactions. Except for Byblos, Old Kingdom imports are rarely attested along the Lebanese coast. Tyre has produced an Egyptian cylinder seal (Ward 1978), and flint tools of Egyptian origin are attested from Sidon (Yazbeck 2006, 293 and Fig. 2d).

In this contribution, the Aegyptiaca from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida, located only 12 km north of Byblos on the Lebanese coast (FIG. 1), will be presented to investigate the extent of Egyptian influence at a site most likely belonging to the political and economic sphere of Byblos.

TELL FADOUS-KFARABIDA

Tell Fadous-Kfarabida is, for the time being, the most intensively excavated Early Bronze Age site in the vicinity of Byblos.

The site was investigated between 2004 and 2016 by a team from the Department of History and Archaeology at the American University of Beirut (Badreshany et al. 2005; Genz 2010; Genz 2014a; Genz and Sader 2007; Genz and Sader 2008; Genz et al. 2009; Genz et al. 2010; Genz et al. 2011; Genz et al. 2018; Genz et al., submitted).

It was settled from the Chalcolithic Period to the Middle Bronze Age, albeit with a few interruptions (Tab. 1). Since the Early Bronze Age III—our local phases III and IV—produced the most substantial

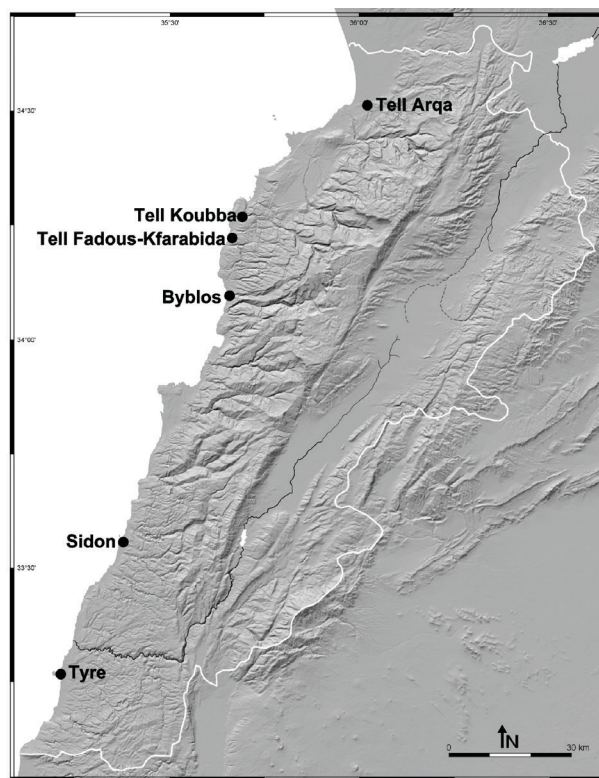


FIGURE 1: Map showing the location of Tell Fadous-Kfarabida and other Early Bronze Age III sites along the Lebanese coast (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project).

remains, this contribution will focus on these phases.

With a size of only 1.5 hectares, the site at first was thought to represent a third-order settlement, that is, a village according to the criteria suggested by Marfoe for the Bekaa (Marfoe 1998) and Thalmann for the Akkar Plain (Thalmann 2007).

However, according to the results obtained from the five different areas opened in various parts of the hill, the site was densely built-up with multi-roomed houses separated by small streets (FIG. 2). Areas I and IV provided evidence for a massive fortification wall, which surrounded the site from at least Phase III onward and very likely continued in use during Phase IV.

Area II, located in the western central part of the mound, provided the most substantial results (FIG. 3). In Phase III (2800–2600 BCE), the area was dominated by an extremely large building (Building 4). Although large parts of it fell victim to bulldozing operations prior to the discovery of the site, its preserved north-south extension of at least 25 m makes it the largest building on the site. Large built-in bins in Rooms 4 and 5 suggest that these

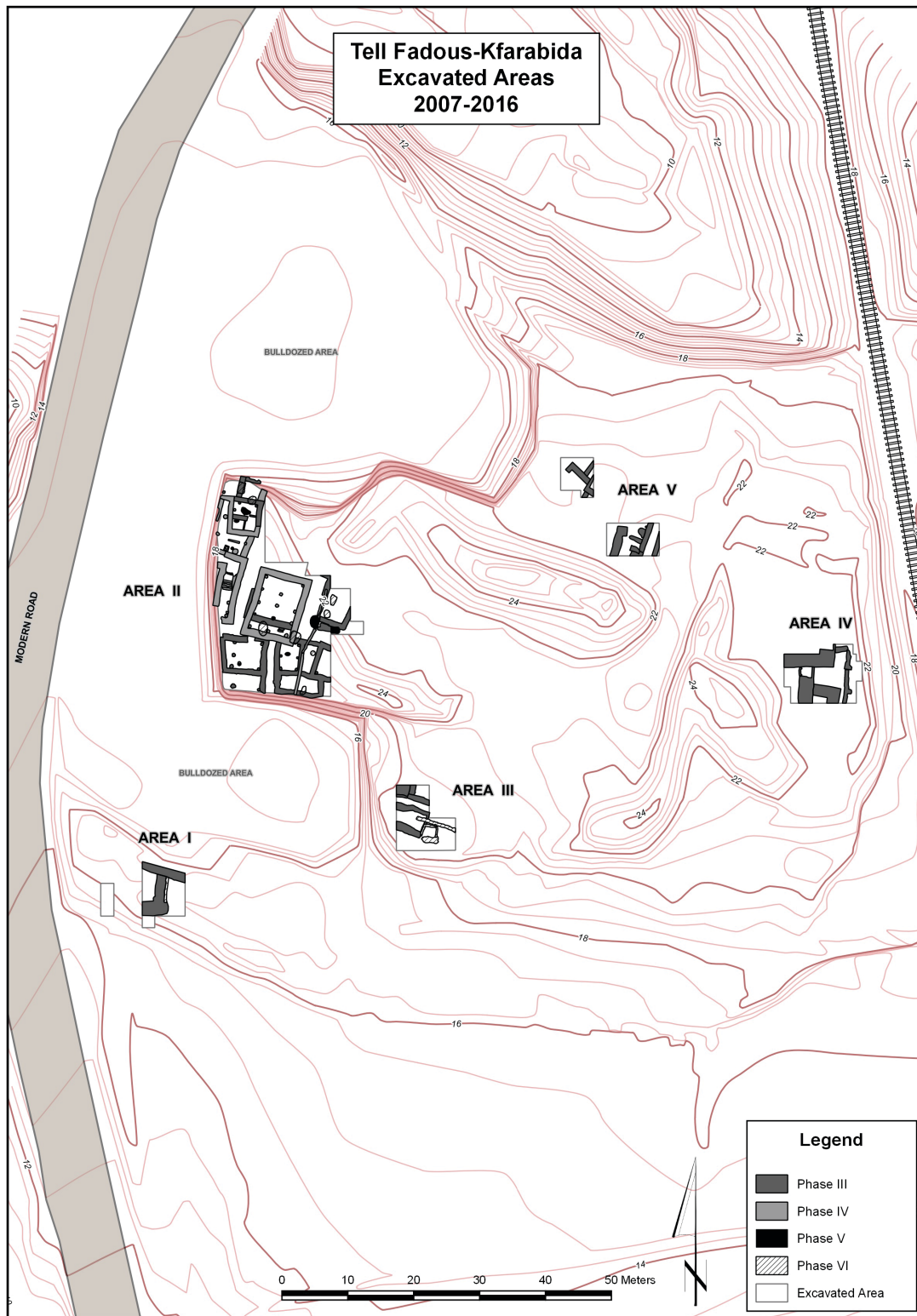


FIGURE 2: Plan of Tell Fadous-Kfarabida showing the location of the excavated areas (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project).

TABLE 1: Periods of occupation at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida.

Phase	Archaeological Period	ARCANE Periodization	Type of Occupation
Phase VI	Middle Bronze Age I/II	–	Pits, burials
Hiatus	Middle Bronze Age I	–	–
Phase V	Early Bronze Age IVB	ECL 6	Pits
Hiatus	Early Bronze Age IVA	ECL 5	–
Phase IV	Early Bronze Age III	ECL 4	Public buildings
Phase III	Early Bronze Age III	ECL 4	Domestic and public buildings, fortification
Phase II	Early Bronze Age II	ECL 3	Domestic buildings
Hiatus	Early Bronze Age I	ECL 1–2	–
Phase I	Chalcolithic	–	Child burials and stray finds

rooms were used for storing substantial amounts of presumably agricultural products. East and south of this building, some large domestic dwellings were partially excavated (Buildings 1, 2, and 5). Room 3 of Building 2 contained a small-scale beam made of bone, suggesting that complex exchange transactions may have been conducted there (FIG. 4) (Genz 2011).

In Phase IV (2600–2500 BCE), Building 4 continued to be used with a few minor modifications. The discovery of a stairwell in Room 2 clearly suggests that the Building had at least one upper story during this Phase (but possibly already earlier). East and south of Building 4, the earlier domestic structures 1, 2, and 5 were abandoned, and partly above them, the columned-hall Building 3 was erected, which only consists of one large rectangular room with inner dimensions of 6.4 x 8.3 m. Thirteen of its original 15 column bases were still found in situ, revealing a regular arrangement of three rows, each containing five column bases (FIG. 5). With a width of approximately 1 m, its walls are rather massive, and the corners are constructed of dressed ashlar. The layout of the building, as well as its impressive dimensions, and, above all, the lack of any indications of domestic activities, suggest that it served administrative or representational purposes.

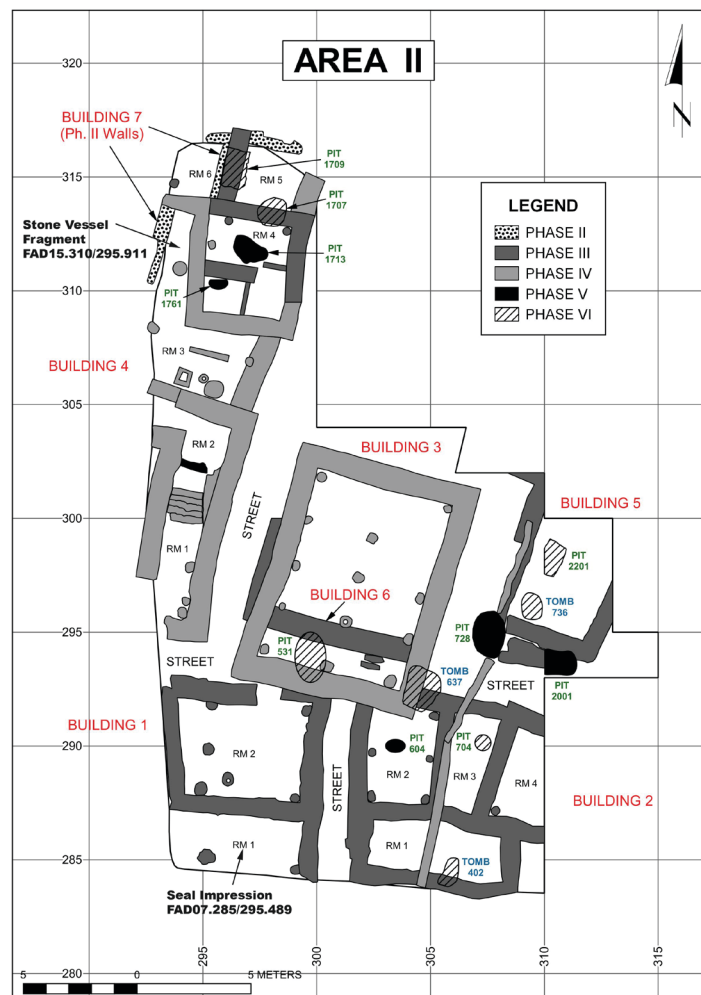


FIGURE 3: Schematic plan of Area II at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project) with the indication of the find locations of the two objects presented in this article.

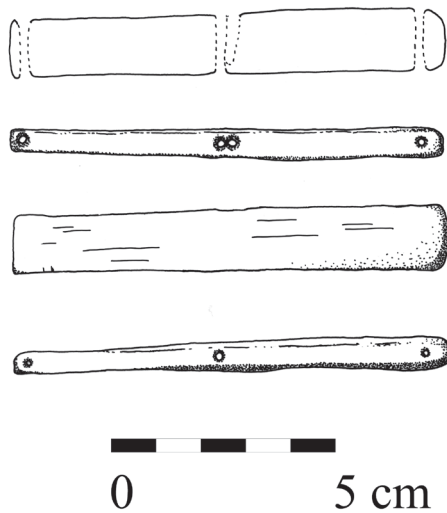


FIGURE 4: Scale beam FAD09.290/305.124 (Phase III) (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project).

The results obtained clearly show that despite its rather small size of 1.5 hectares, Fadous-Kfarabida does not exhibit any features usually associated with villages during the Early Bronze Age. The site was surrounded by a rather massive fortification, and the densely built-up interior with at least partly multi-story houses are features normally associated with urban settlements. Furthermore, Buildings 3 and 4 in Area II and possibly also the partially excavated buildings in Area V fall into the category of 'public' or 'special' buildings due to their size and layout. This idea is also supported by their central position on the site and the finds associated with them.

Tell Fadous-Kfarabida has produced a surprisingly large number of cylinder seal impressions and nine actual cylinder seals (FIG. 6) (Genz and Ahrens 2021). Both the seals and the impressions show a



FIGURE 5: Aerial view of the columned-hall Building 3 (Phase IV) (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project).

close connection between Byblos and Tell Fadous-Kfarabida. In one case, we are virtually certain that the same seal was used for an impression at Byblos and at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida (Genz and Ahrens 2021, 62 and Fig. 13 [FAD07.285/295.89]).

All of the nine cylinder seals found so far at the site come from Buildings 3 and 4 or their immediate vicinity, suggesting that their use was restricted to elite contexts. Three of these seals were manufactured out of hippopotamus ivory, clearly placing them in the category of prestige items (Genz and Ahrens 2021). Additional prestige items, such as a fragment of an Egyptian stone bowl (see below), imported steatite beads (Damick and Woodworth 2015), and extremely finely made ceramic drinking bowls, provide additional evidence for the importance of Building 4 and its association with elites.

According to the radiocarbon evidence, Phase IV came to an end around the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE, which supports the evidence from the Southern Levant for a considerably earlier date for the Early Bronze Age III-IV transition around the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE (Höflmayer et al. 2014). Unfortunately, the Early Bronze Age IVA, that is, the period between approximately 2500 to 2200 BCE at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida, is represented by a hiatus. Ephemeral activities, represented mainly by pits, are only attested again for the Early Bronze Age IVB (Phase V).

THE AEGYPTIACA FROM TELL FADOUS-KFARABIDA

1. A FRAGMENT OF AN EGYPTIAN STONE VESSEL

One fragment of an Egyptian stone vessel (FAD15.310/295.911; from Context 2313) was found during the excavation campaign of 2015 at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida in Area II in a Phase IV context (Early Bronze Age III) (FIG. 7) (Genz et al. 2018, 61-62, fig. 29, pl. 5). The raw material was identified as porphyritic rhyolite, which belongs to the Dokhan Volcanic Formation from the Red Sea or Eastern Desert of Egypt.¹

Although only a small fragment of this vessel was preserved, it can typologically be assigned to an open straight-sided bowl with a plain rim, typically found during the Egyptian Early Dynastic Period (1st–3rd Dynasty) but also continuing into the Old Kingdom (4th–6th Dynasty), with an early Old Kingdom date to be preferred here. Parallels in Egypt are numerous (see Aston 1994, 108–113, types 44–52, with parallels). In the central and northern



FIGURE 6: Selection of Early Bronze Age cylinder seals from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project)

Levant, open bowls of similar type are largely confined to the coastal site of Byblos (Sowada 2009, 128–136, no. 164; Dunand 1958, 934, fig. 1047). A few similar fragments from Tell Mardikh/Ebla in inland western Syria (Sowada 2009, 150–153, pls. 28, 31.179) may originally also have reached the site via Byblos.

Based on its shape and the material used, the vessel fragment most probably dates to the Egyptian Early Dynastic Period or the Old Kingdom, roughly c. 3000–2200 BCE. Due to the fragmented state of the object, it is not possible to further refine its date of production. However, its find context at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida may seem to additionally give a good *terminus ante quem* for its production and deposition in the northern Levant.

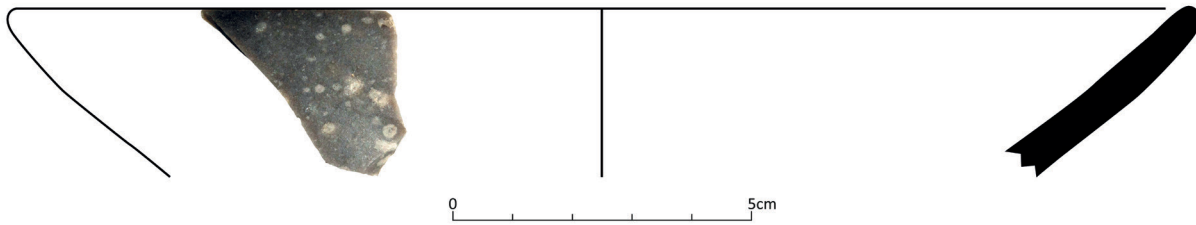


FIGURE 7: Stone vessel fragment FAD15.310/295.911 (Phase IV) (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project).

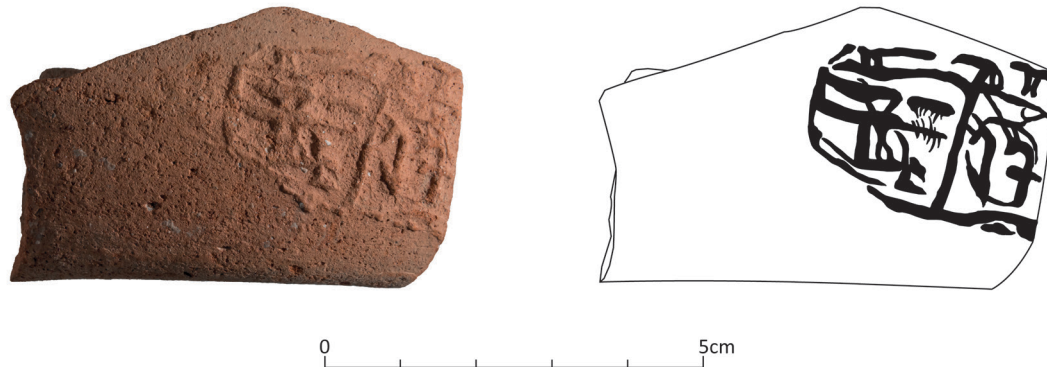


FIGURE 8: Cylinder seal impression on Jar Handle FAD07.285/295.489 (Phase III) (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Project).

2. A CYLINDER SEAL IMPRESSION ON A JAR HANDLE

Among the seals and impressions found at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida, Impression FAD07.285/295.489, executed on a handle of a storage jar made of local clay (FIG. 8), is markedly different and therefore, particularly striking. The find context of this fragment dates to Phase III (from Context 208), the Early Bronze Age III. Unfortunately, the impression was only partially preserved on the handle fragment and was apparently very carelessly impressed prior to firing.² For these reasons, attempting to ascertain precisely which features belong to the actual seal impression and which result from the hasty execution of the impression becomes challenging, making it impossible to cite exact parallels. Therefore, a complete and secure reconstruction of the original seal used seems to be unattainable at the moment. Few signs on the impression can tentatively be identified, possibly depicting, at least in part, Egyptian hieroglyphs or local Levantine emulations of such. The engraved image or inscription appears to be aligned and “read” horizontally. Intriguing is at least one vertical line that seems to divide two separate parts of the inscription or two separate

motifs, a particular feature which is also commonly found on Egyptian cylinder seals of the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom (Kaplony 1963, pls. 96–116; 1981a, 543–145; 1981b, pls. 151–183).³ The seal’s engraving seems to consist of hieroglyphic signs. A large number of Egyptian cylinder seals dating from the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom feature multiple variations of hieroglyphs—ranging from highly structured, finely crafted down to extremely idiosyncratic, crude examples—showing predominantly graphical arrangements of hieroglyphs or other kinds of figures that are difficult or impossible to actually “read.”⁴ This also holds true for most of the few locally produced Levantine cylinder seals dating from the Early Bronze Age depicting “hieroglyphs” or featuring Egyptian iconography and motifs. One could tentatively try to identify specific hieroglyphs depicted here: at the right side of the preserved part of the seal impression, one could identify a cane/rush with shoots sign (i.e., sign M 22 in Gardiner’s sign list (1957), phonetic value *nḥb*) or a *šwt* plant (M 23, thus part of a word with the component *njšwt*?), and—just left of it—perhaps a single reed sign (M 17,

phonetic value *j*). These signs, therefore, are possibly either fragmentary remnants of the toponym Nekheb (el-Kab in Upper Egypt) or even the name of the goddess Nekhbet (i.e., “She of Nekheb”), or a word involving the lexeme “king” or “royal”(?). However, during the Early Dynastic Period—and probably continuing into the Old Kingdom—the sign M 22 (i.e., cane/rush with shoots) can also be read as “*rnw*,” the sign often being part of the designation of a function, social status, or even title referred to as “*rnw/rnwtj*” (“*jrj-nw.tj*”) in a specific group of seals called “*Zivilsiegel*” (Pätznick 2005, 124–137; Nolan 2010, 70; Kaplony had identified this term as a personal name, see Kaplony 1963, 389–390, 556–57, 764–65, and, for example, pls. 93 [no. 358], 97 [no. 396], 115; see also Kahl et al. 1995, 23–27 [seals Ne/Be/17 and Ne/Be/23]; Engel 2021, 25). The title seems to be related to provincial levels of administration in Egypt (“*Lokalbeamter*,” Pätznick 2005, 135–137), though it is unclear whether or not such a function could also be applied to a Levantine context. Interestingly to note, however, is that the term is also attested on a cylinder seal dating from the 3rd–4th Dynasties from Tyre (FIG. 9; see Ward 1978).

Left of the vertical line, the outline of a single individual (or perhaps god/goddess?) standing or sitting on or in an unknown device or furniture (maybe a shrine or a chair?) can be tentatively discerned, a motif that is also often found on cylinder seals of the Early Dynastic Period and continuing into the Old Kingdom (referred to as “*Figur am Speisetisch*,” see Kaplony 1963, 37–45, pls. 105–17; 1964, pls. 6–17; 1977, 16–19, possibly to be read as *Sps*, lit. meaning “august,” “noble,” or “honored;” Pätznick 2005, 526, no. 497; Nolan 2010, 68; Wegner 2018, 234, fig. 13.1; Engel 2021, 17–20).⁵ A depiction of such an individual is also attested in the Southern Levant on a cylinder seal from Bab edh-Dhra’ (Lapp 2003, 547–50, fig. 18.21 [no. 2823]).

Admittedly, the identification of these signs is to be understood as highly speculative and far from secure. However, all in all, the combination of these features would seem to argue for an Old Kingdom date for the cylinder seal’s production. As it is extremely difficult to securely “read” the seal impression and identify individual signs, it remains a moot point to decide whether the seal used for the impression was a genuine Egyptian or a locally produced Egyptianizing Levantine seal.⁶ Since the vessel is made of local clay, and thus clearly

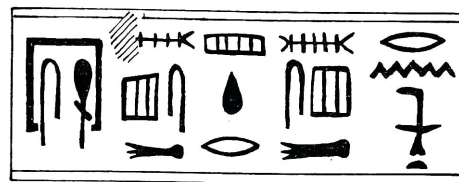


FIGURE 9: Old Kingdom cylinder seal from Tyre, 3rd–4th Dynasty (from Ward 1978, 84, pl. LIV:6).

not an Egyptian import, this could additionally argue for a local Levantine Egyptianizing seal. Further supporting this identification is the fact that Egyptian ceramic containers in the Early Bronze Age only rarely feature seal impressions executed on the vessel prior to firing, while, in the Levant, this practice is frequently attested (Ben-Tor 1978; Mazzoni 1992; Flender 2000; Thalmann 2013), although cylinder seal impressions executed specifically on handles of storage containers are equally rare. Still, also an Egyptian seal could have been used for such a procedure in the Levant and could lead us to speculate about the presence of Egyptians at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida, or the presence of an ill-defined Egyptian administrative system, perhaps centered at nearby Byblos.

This seal impression would thus be the first featuring an Egyptian cylinder seal coming from a secure Early Bronze Age III context in the Central Levant.

EGYPTIAN AND EGYPTIANIZING CYLINDER SEALS IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE LEVANT

While cylinder seals and cylinder seal impressions with local Levantine motifs and iconography are attested at various sites in almost all regions of the Early Bronze Age Levant (Mazzoni 1992; Flender 2000; Genz and Ahrens 2021), evidence for the actual employment of Egyptian hieroglyphs or the use of Egyptian or Egyptianizing motifs (here understood as local Levantine executions and interpretations of Egyptian hieroglyphic signs or motifs) on cylinder seals are only rarely attested thus far.

The few cylinder seals featuring Egyptian or Egyptianizing iconography and motifs from the Southern Levant—apart from the Egyptian seal impressions from the 1st Dynasty way-station of ‘En Besor (Schulman 1976, 1980, 1995)—include one imported Egyptian cylinder seal from Bab edh-Dhra’ dating from the Early Bronze Age II Period/late 1st Dynasty, but coming from an Early Bronze Age III context (Lapp 2003, 547–50, fig. 18.21 [no.

2823]), and a possible second cylinder seal made of pink calcite-alabaster that might exhibit some Egyptian influence, although this is much less clear due to its unfinished state of production (Lapp 2003, 541–43, fig. 18.16 [no. 2860]; Sala 2014, 69–72, tab. 1; 80, fig. 2). One unperforated clay cylinder seal from Gezer seems to feature Egyptian iconography, and—although without a secure find context—probably dates to the late Early Bronze Age I to earlier Early Bronze Age II period (Macalister 1912, 346 [35], pl. CCXIV.27; Ben-Tor 1978, 30, fig. 58 [no. IIIA–1], 83–87; 1985, 8–9, fig. 14). A second cylinder seal from Gezer probably also is to be identified as Egyptian (Macalister 1912, 346 [31], pl. CCXIV.12; Lapp 2003, 549). Another cylinder seal dating from the Early Bronze Age II period from the Sharon Plain is clearly Egyptian in origin but has no secure find context (Rowe 1936, 233, pl. XXVI, S.1; Ben-Tor 1985, 9, fig. 15; see Kaplony 1963, 37–40, pls. 101–15; 1964, pl. 16). Unfortunately, additional and more detailed information on the actual use of these seals cannot be given based on their find contexts.

In the central Levant, an enigmatic cylinder seal of possibly Old Kingdom date—the so-called “Byblos Cylinder Seal”—displays a much-discussed inscription in Egyptian hieroglyphs but seems to be a Levantine production (Sowada 2009, 137, fig. 30b, pl. 17b). A cylinder seal featuring the name of Khafre (4th Dynasty) from Byblos stems from a later context and, therefore, cannot be used for evidence of interregional contacts (Sowada 2009, 137). Finally, the already mentioned cylinder seal from Tyre (see above, Fig. 9), clearly an Egyptian import apparently made of quartz, dates to the first half of the Old Kingdom (3rd–4th Dynasties) but is unfortunately associated with a find context of the late 3rd millennium BCE (Ward 1978, 84–87, pl. LIV.6 [no. 74/11/583]).

Thus, the corpus consists of both Egyptian imports and local Levantine cylinder seals with emulations of Egyptian motifs. It is also interesting to note here that the relative dearth of cylinder seal impressions seems to reflect the meager number of cylinder seals that feature Egyptian or Egyptianizing motifs or hieroglyphs. The brief chronological and geographical survey of the distribution of the admittedly scant evidence for Egyptian and Egyptianizing cylinder seals and seal impressions might be seen in the light of the major shift in Egypt’s relations with the Levant from the Early Bronze Age II onward and especially

in the Early Bronze Age III (Old Kingdom), when it primarily started focusing on the central and northern Levant with their important ports, along with a contemporaneous contraction or diminution, but not necessarily a cessation, of activities in the southern Levant (Arnold et al. 2016). This change is also in general concordance with other groups of *Aegyptiaca* and Egyptian or Levantine pottery found in stratified contexts of the Early Bronze Age Levant and Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom Egypt (Sowada 2009; Sala 2012, 2014, 2016).

CHRONOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS: CONTEXTUALIZING THE SEAL IMPRESSION

Contacts between Egypt and the central and northern Levant are well attested in the archaeological record of both regions since the 4th millennium BCE, as exemplified by the hundreds of pottery vessels from the Levant found in Tomb U-j in Abydos (Hartung 2001). Pottery originating in the central and northern Levantine coastal regions, among other goods, is also found in Egypt at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE (Köhler and Ownby 2011; Köhler and Thalmann 2014), continuing until the end of the Old Kingdom (Sowada 2009, 2014; Forstner-Müller and Raue 2008; 2014; Müller 2014; Wodzińska and Ownby 2011; Thalmann and Sowada 2014).

The southern Levant is primarily within Egypt’s focus in the Early Dynastic Period (1st–2nd Dynasties), with several trading posts and the installation of an Egyptian administrative system, as evidenced at the site of ‘En Besor and other sites west and possibly even east of the Jordan River (Miroschedji 2002; Adams 2017; cf. however Ussishkin 2018; Finkelstein and Ussishkin 2003; Ilan and Goren 2003; Greenberg and Eisenberg 2002; Greenberg 2014; Sala 2012, 2014, 2016; Arnold et al. 2016; Cohen 2016, 22–38; Nigro et al. 2018; Iserlis et al. 2019). These activities are perhaps also reflected in the glyptic evidence from this period.

During the end of the 2nd Dynasty (late Early Dynastic Period) and the start of the 3rd Dynasty (early Old Kingdom), a shift in Egypt’s relations with the central and northern Levant, especially at Byblos, is apparent in both the archaeological and the textual record. This change may have been triggered by the establishment of new seafaring techniques but certainly also concerns the merging of important trade routes and, thus, the acquisition of precious resources in the region of both the central and northern Levant (Wilkinson 1999, 136–137;

Marcus 2002). It is perhaps not a coincidence that a fragment of a stone vessel with the name of King Khasekhemwy of the late 2nd Dynasty is attested at Byblos—however, without a secure find context—while some of the boats buried adjacent to this king's funerary enclosure in Egypt were apparently made of Lebanese cedar wood (Sowada 2009; Wilkinson 1999, 136; Dreyer et al. 2003, 112–114).

The emergence—or availability—of more detailed written and also pictorial sources in Egypt in the course of the 3rd millennium BCE has enabled reconstructing these contacts more precisely, which need not be repeated in detail here (see Helck 1971, 12–37; Redford 1992, 11–64; Sowada 2009, 2014, 2018; Ahrens 2015).⁷ The central Levantine city of Byblos seems to have been the focal point of interest for the Egyptians throughout the Old Kingdom; the reliefs from the causeway of Sahure (5th Dynasty) showing goods and people coming to Egypt from the Levant amply corroborate the contacts between the two regions. These strong relations do not seem to break off until the collapse of the Old Kingdom after the 6th Dynasty. New evidence from Egypt and the Central and Northern Levant may indeed argue for an intensification of contacts during the late Old Kingdom, albeit this may be due to the fragmentary nature of the archaeological and historical records for earlier periods of the Old Kingdom (Marcolin and Espinel 2011; see Ahrens 2015 with a compilation of the sources; Schneider 2015; see also Biga and Steinkeller 2021).

With regard to the presence of the stone vessel mentioned above—clearly, to be considered a prestige item—as well as the seal impression at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida—one is tempted to think of an Egyptian presence at the site during the Early Bronze Age III. While the Egyptian administration of the Old Kingdom seems to have focused on Byblos as the main trading partner in the Levant, a presence of administrative elements at other sites may also seem likely.⁸

Since the site of Tell Fadous-Kfarabida must have belonged to the sphere of political influence, if not dominance, exercised by Byblos during the Early Bronze Age, it would not be surprising to find Egyptian personnel present at the site. The site may then have served, at least partly, as a collecting point or redistribution center for goods (presumably olive oil) coming from its hinterland, perhaps channeled to Egypt via Byblos (for the economic and political status of the site during the Early Bronze Age, see

already Genz et al. 2016). Supporting the contacts with the site, along with several other sites along the central Levantine coast, several examples of ram's head applications on pottery are attested in Phases III and IV (Genz 2014a, 72, fig. 12; see also Peršin, this volume), an example of which is also found on a Lebanese import from 4th Dynasty Giza (i.e., Tomb G 7330 A, see Mazzoni 1985; Sowada 2009; Sowada et al. 2020; see also Sowada et al. 2021; Badreshany et al. 2022). Such collecting points or redistribution centers with an Egyptian presence would, along with Byblos as the main hub, perhaps also help explain the Egyptian finds dating to the Old Kingdom farther north, among these the Egyptian stone vessels found at Tell Mardikh/Ebla (Scandone Matthiae 1981; Sowada 2009, 2018).

When trying to contextualize the seal impression, the intensified contacts between Egypt and the central and northern Levantine rulers since at least the beginning of the Early Bronze Age III would seem to provide the basis for an increased presence of Egyptian emissaries and objects, and thus also an increase of Egyptian iconography and motifs used in the Early Bronze Age central and northern Levant. However, it could also well be that Levantine individuals, and not Egyptians, transported the objects to the site.

FURTHER POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS WITH EGYPT

Further tentative connections with Egypt at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida may be attested by the presence of date palm phytoliths at the site (Damick 2019). The date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) is not endemic to the coastal Levant (Zohary and Hopf 2000, 165–170), while its use in Egypt during the Old Kingdom is amply attested in the archaeobotanical record (Gale et al. 2000, 347–348). As the date palm phytoliths from Fadous-Kfarabida are restricted to storage compartments in the Early Bronze Age III buildings, it suggests the use of mats, bags, or baskets made out of palm fibers rather than the consumption of the actual fruits. This could be another hint that Fadous-Kfarabida contributed to supplying Egypt with valuable agricultural products, but probably indirectly via Byblos.⁹

A number of fired steatite beads were retrieved from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida Phase III and IV contexts (Damick and Woodworth 2015). Steatite is not attested in Lebanon, so these beads definitely represent imports. While Egypt, with its long tradition of fired steatite products, remains a

very probable source of these beads, an origin in Mesopotamia or even the Indus Valley cannot be ruled out (Damick and Woodworth 2015, 613–614).

The presence of jars with combed decoration in Old Kingdom contexts throughout Egypt has long been recognized as evidence of the import of various organic commodities from the Levant (Helck 1971, 30–35; Mazzoni 1985; Forstner-Müller and Raue 2008; Sowada 2009, 155–158; Knoblauch 2010; Forstner-Müller and Raue 2014; Thalmann and Sowada 2014, 369–373; Sowada et al. 2019), including—but not restricted to—various oils and tree resins. Petrographic and chemical evidence (Sowada 2009, 167–179; Badreshany et al. 2020; Sowada et al. 2019), as well as the presence of ram’s head applications (Mazzoni 1985), which show a marked concentration on the Central Levantine coast north of the Carmel Ridge, clearly demonstrate the importance of the central Levantine coast in this trade. As with Byblos (Mazzoni 1985) and Sidon (Doumet-Serhal 2006, 27 and Pl. 174, 5–7), ram’s head applications on combed jars are well attested at Fadous-Kfarabida (Genz 2014b, 72 and Fig. 12), again suggesting that the site may have contributed in supplying various organic commodities to Egypt.

CONCLUSIONS

Far from just being a small village site, the combined artefactual and archaeobiological evidence from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida suggests that the site should be interpreted as an Early Bronze Age III administrative subcenter connected to the more important site of Byblos. If this interpretation is accepted, it suggests a more complex economic and political organization during the Early Bronze Age III in coastal Lebanon than hitherto envisaged (Genz et al. 2016). Byblos seems to be the only large Early Bronze Age site on the central coast of Lebanon, controlling all or at least large parts of this region. Tell Fadous-Kfarabida, within such a picture, would have most likely served as an administrative outpost for Byblos, presumably for collecting valuable crops like wheat and olives to sustain Byblos and its trade networks. The macrobotanical evidence from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida with a clear focus on wheat and olive suggests that production was less geared towards local consumption, but the site most likely funneled these products into a larger trade network, certainly involving Byblos (Deckers et al. 2021; Genz et al. 2016).

The limited number of Egyptian finds from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida fits quite well into such a picture. It is highly unlikely that the *Aegyptiaca* reached the site directly due to the absence of a natural harbor (Pedersen 2007; Pedersen 2012, 6–7). Thus, the more likely scenario is that these few Egyptian or Egyptianizing objects reached the site via Byblos.

At present, Fadous-Kfarabida’s connections with Egypt seem to be restricted to the Early Bronze Age III (our Phases III and IV), corresponding to the early Old Kingdom in Egypt. At Byblos, on the other hand, contacts with Egypt seem to have intensified during the later Old Kingdom, now to be equated with the Early Bronze Age IVA in the Levant (Ahrens 2015). Unfortunately, this period at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida is represented by a hiatus. Only in the Early Bronze Age IVB activities are attested again at Tell Fadous-Kfarabida (Phase V), but no connections with Egypt are attested anymore, probably because trade relations with the Levant ceased due to the instability associated with the First Intermediate Period in Egypt.

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NOTES

- ¹ We would like to thank Prof. A. Abdel Rahman (Geology Department, American University of Beirut) for the geological examination.
- ² The reconstructed height of the seal is approximately 15–20 mm, the diameter is unknown. The actual seal was presumably made of stone or even wood, which is amply attested in Egypt for the periods of the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom, see Kaplony 1963; Wegner 2018: 227–324.
- ³ Among the motifs of Levantine Early Bronze Age seal impressions, vertical lines are also attested, albeit almost exclusively in connection with geometric patterns (i.e., net or herringbone patterns, concentric circles, spirals, or rhomboids), either as a sole motif or as a combination of these (see Ben-Tor 1978; 1985). This, however, clearly is not the case with the seal impression under discussion here.
- ⁴ See Nolan 2018, 272–75; Wegner 2018, 233–36; Willems 2018; Engel 2021). Peter Kaplony (1981a, 543) also refers to some of these seals as “*Figurensiegel/-zylinder*” (“Figurative Seals”). In this respect, it must be noted here that most of Kaplony’s seals belonging to this category come from unprovenanced contexts and collections, so there is the probability that some

of these seals actually originate from the Levant (Kaplony 1981a, 543–45).

⁵ In the Old Kingdom, belonging to a specific group of administrative seals (*“Verwaltungssiegel”*) referred to by Kaplony as *“Totensiegel”* (“Seals of the Dead”), see Kaplony 1977: 16–19; Engel 2021.

⁶ The lack of such seals or seal impressions may simply be a reflection of the scant archaeological evidence and the scarcity of comparable excavated settlements in the region for this period.

⁷ This is not to say that all contacts between Egypt and the southern Levant come to a halt during this period; see Greenberg and Eisenberg 2002; Sala 2012, 2014, 2016.

⁸ For the organization of the Egyptian administrative system during the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom, see Andrásy 2008; Bárta 2013; Engel 2013; Moreno García 2013; Papazian 2012, 2013.

⁹ It remains unknown if, prior to their use in the storage compartments in Fadous-Kfarabida, the palm fiber containers had been used to transport Egyptian commodities to the Levant.