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A Newly Discovered Neo-Assyrian Cylinder Seal from Gezer in Context

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses an Assyrianized cylinder seal found in 2007 in Gezer and its affinities to other Assyrian or Assyrianized cylinder seals made of hard semi-precious stones from Israel/Palestine and Jordan. By examining the seal in relation to other glyptic items found at Gezer, an effort is made to shed light on the role of Gezer during the period of the Assyrian conquest.

A HALF-BROKEN cylinder seal was retrieved in July 2007 during the second season of the renewed excavations of Gezer, sponsored by Tandy Institute for Archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Excavations and directed by Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wolff.

Following a description of the seal’s archaeological context, material, workmanship and style, we will discuss its theme and associations with Neo-Assyrian imagery and its affinity to other Assyrian or Assyrianized cylinder seals made of similar stones from Israel/Palestine and Jordan. We will then examine it in relation to other glyptic items found at Gezer, aiming to shed light on the role of Gezer during the period of the Assyrian conquest.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The locus in which the cylinder seal was found (square Y5, L22104) was a compact construction fill consisting of a matrix of light yellow, burned mudbrick detritus, with clay-like material and white chip inclusions (Munsell: 10YR 7/3). The locus was found at a level of 216.8–216.7 m. asl, under loci associated with the trenching activity undertaken at the site by R.A.S. Macalister over a century earlier. Thus, it is a ‘clean’ locus without Macalister intrusions. Stratigraphically, L22104 is situated below the level of the Hellenistic wall foundations and above the level of the plaster/cobble surface, L42033/L42055, which is ascribed to the

1 Other glyptic finds discovered by the Tandy Excavations and classified as Assyrian will be published by Baruch Brandl. The authors wish to express their appreciation to Gary Arbino, field supervisor of the Tandy Excavations at Tel Gezer, for providing us with the information on the seal’s context and to Benjamin Sass for his kind permission to publish the photographs in figs. 5, 6, 17 and 19.
last eighth-century phase (Str. 6a; Ortiz and Wolff 2012: 14–16). Because the make-up of L22104 is not that of in situ destruction debris — it is much more homogeneous — it likely represents an intentional fill. The fill was apparently laid as backfill following trenching/robbing activities after the eighth-century destruction. This stratum (Str. 5), which dates from the late eighth (post-732 BCE) or seventh century, is an ephemeral phase between the last eighth-century building phase (Str. 6a) and the Persian (Str. 4) and Hellenistic (Str. 3) occupations. Because of extensive late Persian and early Hellenistic pitting activity, only minimal and fragmentary architecture (e.g., a corner of two walls, a *tabun*, a deep silo, a bin and some disconnected patches of surfaces) and few finds have been assigned to Str. 5 in the current excavation field (for a complete Phoenician torpedo storage jar from this stratum, see Ortiz and Wolff 2012).

**DESCRIPTION OF THE CYLINDER SEAL**

*Workmanship and Style*

The seal (height: 3.8 cm.; diameter: 1.8 cm.; figs. 1–4) is made of whitish chalcedony. It is broken along its perforation; the remaining part forms half of the original.

The seal was engraved with a file, which created rather deep incisions, with only limited use of a drill traced at the tip of the hanging sword, at the rump of the hybrid mount, at the tips of its opened jaws, and probably at the tip of its tail. The body of the hybrid mount was hollowed out. The style created is unique: although it seems linear it does not conform to the contemporary Assyrian linear-style seals, since linear engraving was usually applied on softer stones (Collon 2001: 2–3), on which the incisions are deeper and thickened; nor does it fit the Assyrian cut style. The exceptional style of the Gezer seal was probably the outcome of applying file engraving on a hard stone, instead of drilling or cutting techniques, which were the usual Assyrian methods for working with hard micro-quartzite stones such as chalcedony, jasper, or carnelian (Sax *apud* Collon 2001: 20–23).

The left side of the seal still shows traces of polishing, while its right side is worn. The seal was perforated lengthwise from both ends, as was the prevailing norm in the cutting of cylinder seals (Gorelick and Gwinnett 1978: 39, fig. 3; Wartke 1997: 52). Only half of the seal has survived and the remaining part of the perforation reveals two slight distortions: it is not entirely vertical and was worked in varying planes; the lower third is higher than the upper part (fig. 2). These distortions may have raised the susceptibility of the perforation — the vulnerable part of any seal — which resulted in its splitting, possibly the outcome of a simple event, such as the falling of the object on a hard surface like a stone floor.
The Visual Theme
The surviving half of the seal depicts a figure standing above a winged beast, both turning to the right (on the impression, figs. 3–4). The thin oblique line crossing the figure’s headgear represents a horn (one of a pair in a profile depiction), and the position above a fantastic animal defines the figure as a deity: a bearded god, wearing a horned oblong hat. The diagonal, short and thickened line seen below the back side of the head probably represents the god’s hair, resting on his nape. The god wears a long dress that covers his left leg while exposing his right, typical of war deities in Mesopotamia in general, particularly during the Neo-Assyrian period. Between the god’s spread legs are traces of a checker pattern, representing the inner side of his dress (see Collon 2003: 10*-14*, figs. 1–3). Hanging
obliquely behind the god is a long sword, the circular edge of which represents the decorated end of its sheath (Herbordt 1992: pl. 1:1; Collon 2001: nos. 232, 240; 2006: fig. 180). Rather than resting his feet on the beast, the god seems to ‘hover’ above it. His wide stance spans the distance from the creature’s head to its tail. With his right outstretched arm the god draws a bow, and with his backward-drawn left arm he stretches the bow-string. As a result of this gesture, the god is leaning slightly forward. Combined with the wide stride and the direction of the drawn bow, the image conveys a swift movement, such as running while shooting.

This sense of movement is also conveyed through the oblique outward rendering of the beast’s fore and hind legs, creating a wide space, which implies that the creature is leaping (cf. Collon 2001: no. 233). The winged beast has an uplifted curling tail — part of which is missing due to the break of the seal — reminiscent of a lion’s tail. Its jaws are wide open, and it has a large curling horn on its forehead. The wings grow from the neck and consist of a diagonal thickened line that splits near the back. Three horizontal strokes stemming from the inner side of the diagonal line mark the wings’ feathers.

It is the lion’s body, the wings, the large horn and the wide-open jaws that associate the beast with a fantastic hybrid, termed in modern scholarship a lion-griffin (löwendrache): a creature that has the talons of a bird of prey, bull’s horns and the tail of a bird or a scorpion (Álvarez-Mon 2011: 313–314, 334–338). The bird’s tail identifies the lion-griffin as the anzu-bird, Ninurta’s rival (Moortgat-Correns 1988), while the scorpion’s tail identifies it as abûbu, the flood monster, the flood being one of Ninurta’s terrible weapons. These fantastic creatures on Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals serve as the mounts of a god shooting a bow while running in a wide step, often identified as Ninurta (Collon 2006: 103, figs. 170–177, 182; Álvarez-Mon 2011: 338–340). Such seals are usually made of hard stone and date from the late ninth and the eighth centuries (Collon 2001: 148; 2006: 103, figs. 170, 174, 175, 177).

In contrast to the bird- or scorpion-tailed monsters on Assyrian seals, the mount hybrid on the Gezer seal has a lion’s tail, yet it diverges from the Mesopotamian seals in another aspect: the god ‘hovers’ above the beast, while hardly touching it, whereas in Assyrian and Babylonian renderings, the god

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2 The combination of leonine traits with other animals’ characteristics is a most typical feature of the allusions to strong and legendary beasts in ancient Near Eastern imagery in both textual and visual modes of expressions (Jones 2011).

3 Seidl 1998; Amar 2002: 123, 126; CAD s.v. abûbu. The flood as a demonized hybrid suppressed by Yahweh, who victoriously sits on the monster, appears in Ps. 29:10: י-return למלך יָהֵוֹחָנָן (‘YHWH sat enthroned at the Flood, and YHWH sits as King forever’). For biblical and later rabbinic allusions to the Ninurta myth, in particular to the imagery of the anzu bird, identified as יָהֵוֹ חוֹמָן (Ps. 50:11 and 80:14), see Wazana 2009.
usually rests his feet — often in different planes — on the beast’s back, head, or neck (e.g. Collon 2001: nos. 232, 233, 290–292). Thus, despite the general dependence of the Gezer seal on Assyrian iconography, the latter two iconographic features, combined with the unusual linear engraving on hard stone, suggest that the seal was probably a provincial product inspired by the Neo-Assyrian glyptic imagery of Ninurta (cf. a hard stone cylinder seal with linear engraving and gouging from Shechem; Ornan 2001: 236–237, 244). Ninurta was the patron god of Kalkhu-Nimrud (Amar 2002: 42), the Assyrian capital during the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II until Sargon II, from the ninth to the late eighth centuries. Accordingly, we may date the production of the Gezer seal to the second half of the eighth, or perhaps the beginning of the seventh, century — the period of the Assyrian occupation in Israel.

The clear sense of swift movement of both the god and his mount on the Assyrian seals and on the seal from Gezer is befitting of combatant deities, in particular storm gods, such as Ninurta chasing anzu, as depicted on two mirroring panels located at the entrance to the temple of the god at Nimrud, built by Ashurnasirpal in 865. The surviving panel, currently in the collection of the British Museum, shows the god running — his backward left leg ‘hovers’ in the air — after anzu (BM ANE 124571: Collon 2006: 101, figs. 161–162). Whereas in the glyptic representations Ninurta holds a bow, in the Nimrud relief — the only mythological theme found in monumental Assyrian art — he carries in each hand a lightning fork that links him to Adad, with whom he shared his belligerent and stormy affinities (Amar 2002: 24; cf. a stele from Arslan Tash [Bunnens 2006: 116–117, fig. 73]). Indeed, the image of Ninurta chasing anzu in motion in glyptic and monumental representations fits textual descriptions of the god, which stress his swiftness (Amar 2002: 105–106). Based on the Neo-Assyrian glyptic parallels, in which the riding combatant god chases a fleeing monster — often the same or a similar type to the hybrid on which he strides (e.g., Collon 2003: 12*–13*), we may suggest that a divine rival, recalling the lion-griffin mount, was also shown on the now-missing half of the seal from Gezer.

A composition recalling this reconstruction is depicted on a cylinder seal found in the Megiddo water system (fig. 5; Lamon 1935: pl. 8:6). The seal from Megiddo differs from the Gezer seal in the stone of which it is made and in the depiction of bird-headed griffins instead of a horned, lion-headed lion-griffin, suggesting that the former was a local product (Ornan 2013: 58). A related theme is depicted on a cylinder seal of unknown provenance, kept in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, which shows a standing god shooting a rampant winged monster (fig. 6). This quartzite cut-style seal was among the archaeological finds

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4 Parker 1949: 38, no. 172; Keel and Uehlinger 1998: fig. 284a; van der Veen and Zerbst 2005: 34, fig. 2; Wazana 2009: 116–117, fig. 1; cf. a seal impression from Nineveh: Herbordt 1992: pl. 5:8.
that reached the British Mandatory Palestine Department of Antiquities from the old Ottoman Museum of Jerusalem (Cobbing and Tubb 2005); hence, its attribution as a local find seems reasonable.

FIRST-MILLENNIUM MICRO-QUARTZITE CYLINDER SEALS IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND JORDAN

The chalcedony of the new Gezer seal and the Rockefeller Museum seal links them with six locally-found Assyrian or Assyrianized hard micro-quartzite stone cylinder seals, uncovered at Bethsaida, Gibeon, Beersheba, Tell el-Mazar (two items) and on the Mediterranean coast, south of Netanya. The two seals from Tell el-Mazar, found in a massive seventh-century building, are closest to the Gezer seal in the application of linear engraving on a hard stone — jasper — suggesting that they too are to be considered local products. One of the Tell el-Mazar seals (fig. 7) depicts two bird-headed standing human-like figures flanking a crescent-on-a-pole, the latter a most common motif in the western parts of the Assyrian Empire (Keel 1994). The other seal (fig. 8) shows two hybrids (griffins/sphinxes) flanking a volute tree.

Figs. 7–8. Cylinder seals from Tell el-Mazar: modern impressions (Yassine 1988: nos. 303, 304)
The seals from Bethsaida and Gibeon, in contrast, are probably Assyrian imported products, as implied by their more intensive engraving techniques: drilling and cutting on hard stones. The carnelian seal from Bethsaida depicts a combat between a winged human-form figure and a winged human-headed quadruped standing on its hind legs (fig. 9; Brandl 1999: 225–230). The crowded drillings applied for the composition associate it with seventh-century Assyro-Babylonian contest seals of the Late Drilled style (Collon 2001: 166–167, 182–183, nos. 364–367; cf. Herbordt 1992: pl. 8:7). The quartzite seal from Gibeon, found in the fill of the pool (fig. 10), was also worked in seventh-century Late Drilled Assyrian style (cf. Porada 1948: no. 707; for similar motifs, see Herbordt 1992: pls. 5:1, 9:1, 22:1,3). It shows a worshipper gesturing towards a tree, on the other side of which stands a horned animal on its rear legs.

The now lost cylinder seal found south of Netanya (in the vicinity of the Wingate Institute) is a chance find of white chalcedony (fig. 11). Inscribed with the legend of Bel-ašarrad, the palace overseer (rab ĕkalli; Tadmor and Tadmor 1995; Horowitz and Oshima 2006: 153), it is the only Early Drilled-style cylinder seal to be found in Israel. It depicts two worshippers in front of the god Adad, who stands on a crouching bull. The absence of an archaeological context for the find may lead one to speculate whether it was necessarily brought to its find-spot during the Iron Age. However, since the seal, as retrieved, was attached to a bronze fibula dated to the seventh–sixth centuries (Pedde 2000: group B5, no. 277, pl. 20:277), we may classify it as a ninth–eighth-century seal kept by some individual during the seventh or sixth century.

The inscribed chalcedony cylinder seal from Beersheba, which also shows a worshipper before Adad (fig. 12; Horowitz and Oshima 2006: 44), poses difficulties with regard to its date and to the period it could have reached the site.
Although the linear engraving on a micro-quartzite stone hints to an eighth-century provincial product, as suggested by Beck (1973), the linear rendering of a worshipper before an anthropomorphic god implies that the pictorial composition was made earlier, perhaps in the late second millennium (Ornan 2003), and that its inscription was added later, during the eighth century. The seal was found in the debris of the street surrounding the summit of the tel, previously assigned to Stratum II. However, it probably belonged to a second-century BCE favissa of the Hellenistic temple (Derfler 1981; 1993: 51–52). Since no finds alluding to an Assyrian presence were found in Stratum II, it is safer to regard the seal as an artefact that probably reached the site after the Assyro-Babylonian period, possibly during the Hellenistic period.

The above summary shows that the new seal from Gezer joins only two other hard micro-quartzite cylinder seals found in Israel/Jordan which, on the basis of their workmanship and style, could have been made locally.

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5 The five horizontal lines (raised in the middle) to the left of the worshipper recall the pedestal on which Adad stands (on the right), suggesting that another deity was originally shown behind the worshipper. This figure was erased when the legend was added (cf. Beck 1973: 59).
ASSYRIAN GLYPTIC FINDS FROM GEZER

Cylinder Seals

The new seal from Gezer joins five other Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals found at the site by Macalister (1912: II, 346–347, nos. 33, 34, 38, 41, 42; III, pl. 214:15, 19,22–24), four of which were discussed by Reich and Brandl (1985: 45–47, fig. 6). These form the largest group of Assyrian cylinder seals to have been found at one site in Israel and Jordan; hence, they may shed light upon the role of Gezer as a major administrative centre during the period of the Assyrian conquest. Our knowledge of the material(s) of these Gezer seals is somewhat speculative because of the ill-reported details of Macalister in this respect. Nevertheless, it is clear that three seals are made of soft, artificial, unglazed compositions (Macalister 1912: III, pl. 214:15,19,23; Reich and Brandl 1985: fig. 6:1–3); the material of the fourth is unknown (Macalister 1912: III, pl. 214:22). The fifth cylinder seal reported by Macalister is said to be made of hematite (Macalister 1912: II, 346, no. 34; III, pl. 214:24; Reich and Brandl 1985: 47, fig. 6:4); however, since hematite was not a common material for cylinder seals in the first millennium BCE, it may be postulated that it was made of serpentine, a soft dark stone more common in contemporary cylinder seals.

One cylinder seal from Gezer depicts two hybrids facing one another, with human heads, birds’ tails and feline paws; they probably represent lesser protective beings (fig. 13). This subject matter assigns the seal to a group of locally-found Assyrian or Assyrianized seals — common in the western parts of the Assyrian Empire — displaying only animals or hybrid creatures.6

The other four cylinder seals from Gezer belong to the large group of Neo-Assyrian combat scenes, two of them depicting the ‘master of animals’ motif:

Fig. 13. Cylinder seal from Gezer with modern impression (IAA J.866; courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority)

figures holding animals accompanied by a star and trees. Little can be said regarding the seal with two animal rivals, because of the insufficient details of its publication (fig. 14). Its metal loop, however, assigns it to the Neo-Assyrian period. The seal depicting a hero with a sickle sword and one animal rival (fig. 15; Reich and Brandl 1985: 46, fig. 6:2, with parallels) may have had a late eighth–seventh-century Babylonian inspiration, although the type is found in north Mesopotamia (Collon 2001: 154, nos. 299–301, 304–306).

Two other cylinder seals depict archers; in this, they can be associated with the new Gezer seal, although they are not made of micro-quartzite stones. One shows an archer on a horse chasing a gazelle, next to which there is a forward-leaning human figure (fig. 16); this is an unusual scene inspired by monumental Assyrian depictions. The other seal depicts a winged archer shooting a horned snake with an inward-curving body (fig. 17), a theme more relevant to the new Gezer seal. The creature is identified with the bašmu snake, another rival of Ninurta, who, in time, also became an opponent of Marduk.

8 Macalister 1912: III, pl. 214:19; Reich and Brandl 1985: 46, fig. 6:1, with parallels; cf. Herfordt 1992: 86–87, pl. 5: 9,12,13; Collon 2006: 106–107, figs. 185–189.
Stamp Seals and Impressions

The Assyrian cylinder seals from Gezer are complemented by ten contemporary stamp seals and impressions, five of which were discussed by Reich and Brandl (1985: 47–48, fig. 7). The stratigraphic location of the seven stamp seals from Gezer is unknown, except for the fact that, with one exception, they were retrieved in occupation accumulations. The materials of which they were made — soft stones (mainly limestone and serpentine), sintered quartz and glass — combined with their forms — scaraboids, conoids and plaques — suggest that they are Assyrianized items, made in the western territories of the Assyrian Empire, some perhaps at Gezer.

The themes depicted on these glyptic items vary: 1) a striding griffin on a conoid glass seal (fig. 18; Macalister 1912: II, 347, no. 28); 2) a pair of rampant crossed winged ibexes (fig. 19; Macalister 1912: II, 296, no. 16; III, pl. 200:14), manifesting a revived first-millennium version of an age-old Mesopotamian motif; 3) a figure flanked by two animals, probably representing the ‘master of animals’ motif, schematically filed on a conoid stone seal (fig. 20); 4) a winged disc depicted on an oval, thin, plaque-shaped sintered quartz seal (fig. 21; Macalister 1912: I, 328, no. 384; Reich and Brandl 1985: 47–48, fig. 7:4); 5) a crescent-
on-a-pole engraved on a serpentine scaraboid (fig. 22; Macalister 1912: II, 324, no. 266; Reich and Brandl 1985: 47–48, fig. 7:5); 6) a rounded limestone seal depicting a chariot ridden by three schematic figures, a theme inspired by contemporary Assyrian monumental martial representations (fig. 23; Macalister 1912: II, 328; Shuval 1990: 80, fig. 029 with parallels).

A unique stamp seal that came from the antiquities market and is housed in the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem, is probably another seal originally excavated by Macalister at Gezer, found in tomb 4 of the so-called Philistine tombs (fig. 24; Macalister 1912: I, 293, fig. 154:14). The seal is made of a carnelian pebble and uniquely shows a veneration of a griffin. The unique form and theme of the seal suggest that it may have been a local product (Ornan 2013).
Fig. 22. Scaraboid seal from Gezer; present whereabouts unknown (Macalister 1912: III, pl. 207:47)

Fig. 23. Rounded stamp seal from Gezer; present whereabouts unknown (Macalister 1912: III, pl. 209:12)

Fig. 24. Pebble seal from Gezer (The Bible Lands Museum no. 1001; photo: D. Loggie, courtesy Bible Land Museum; drawing: N. Ze'evi)
To the above seven seals from Gezer we should add impressions of three other seals stamped on the two land-sale Assyrian contracts found close to a thick-walled structure, which probably served as an administrative Assyrian building during the seventh century (Reich and Brandl 1985: 41–44, fig. 3). The 21 private names mentioned in the two documents include Hebrew name-bearers, as well as names pertaining to individuals with a Babylonian or Aramaic background and one Egyptian name, demonstrating the mixed population of mid-seventh-century Gezer that befits an Assyrian administrative centre (Becking 1981–82: 82–89; Horowitz and Oshima 2006: 55–59).

Impressions of two seals, each stamped twice, are found on the land-sale tablet dated to 651 BCE. One shows a schematised tree (fig. 25; Reich and Brandl 1985: 47–48, fig. 7:1, with references; Herbordt 1992: 168, pl. 12:7; Becking 1992: 114–117). The two impressions made by the other seal show two worshippers facing one another, with an offering table and a bowl between them and a winged disc above them (fig. 26; Reich and Brandl 1985: 47–48, fig. 7:2; Herbordt 1992: 168, pl. 14:11). Compositions consisting of two figures facing one another with tables or pedestals with cultic objects between them are found in Assyria (e.g., at Nimrud and Nineveh, the latter on a document dated to 652; Herbordt 1992: 168, 238–239, pl. 13:18,19). These scenes are particularly common, however, on inscribed west-Semitic seals (Keel 1994: 174–176, figs. 85–93). These include excavated items such as a seal from Samaria on which two letters, \textit{km}, have survived, perhaps referring to the Moabite god Chemosh (Crowfoot, Crowfoot and Kenyon 1957: 87, pl. 15:21; Avigad and Sass 1997: no. 1078); the seal of \textit{mškt bn whzm} from ‘En Hazeva (Naveh 2001) and the seal of \textit{šlmt}, found in 2008 in area G in the City of David (Winderbaum 2012: 89–91).

On the land-sale document dating from 649 BCE there are three impressions made by one seal, depicting a crescent-on-a-pole and a star (fig. 27; Becking 1981–82: 86–88; Reich and Brandl 1985: 48, fig. 7:3). The vendor bears a Hebrew
name, Natanyahu, whose seal was probably the one that formed the three impressions (Becking 1981–82: 87; 1992: 117–118). As can be gleaned from glyptic finds with crescent-on-a-pole found in the City of David (Brandl 2000: 63–65; Winderbaum 2012: 96–97), the use of astral symbols, in particular the crescent-on-a-pole, is not uncommon in Judah, and sheds light on a Assyrian and/or Aramaean inspiration on Judahite religious symbols in the late eighth and seventh centuries (Keel 2012: 330–332, figs. 93–95; Winderbaum 2012: 87–89; cf. the winged disk on lmlk impressions, Ornan 2005b). Like the actual stamp seals found at Gezer, the motifs impressed on the two Assyrian documents are typical of the glyptic repertoire of the western territories of the Assyrian Empire during the eighth–seventh centuries BCE.

CONCLUSIONS

The Assyrian and Assyrianized character of Gezer reflected in the glyptic items discussed above is complemented by other finds, including Assyrian ‘palace ware’, armour scales, horse trappings and Assyrian-type architectural components, which were probably introduced and used by administrative or military Assyrian functionaries (Reich and Brandl 1985: 42–45). These finds may be attributed to Stratum 5 of the Tandy Excavations (or Stratum V of the Hebrew Union College excavations), assigned to the period following the Assyrian campaign of 734/733 BCE, conducted by Tiglath-pilesar III (Dever 1984: 215–216; 1985: 226; Gitin 1990: 17). Although the attack on Gezer is not recorded in Assyrian inscriptions (Becking 1981–82: 78), the status of Gezer

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12 The destruction of this stratum is represented by Tandy Excavations Stratum 6/Hebrew Union College Stratum VIA (Ortiz and Wolff 2012: 15–16).

13 As suggested by Dubovský (2006: 157–158), the capture of Gezer may have taken place after the Assyrian conquest of Transjordan, at the end of Tiglath-pilesar III’s campaign.
within the Assyrian provinces of Israel/Palestine is reflected by the presentation of the siege of the city — identified by an epigraph — on a relief on Wall IV from the Central Palace of Tiglath-pileser at Nimrud (Barnett and Falkner 1962: 24, pl. 62; Tadmor 1994: 210, 239, fig. 11 upper). The Assyrian domination at Gezer ended sometime after 649 BCE, as implied by the date of the above-noted Assyrian sale document from the site. The lack of typical Babylonian pyramidal and conoid seals with a veneration of divine symbols (Ornan 2005a: 115–132) from the glyptic repertoire of Gezer may support the assumption that the site ceased to function as an imperial administrative centre during the short-lived Babylonian hegemony.

The new cylinder seal from Gezer manifests clear Neo-Assyrian inspiration. However, the use of a file-engraving with only minimal drillings on chalcedony, creating an uncommon style of hard-stone Assyrian seals, as well as the alteration of the plumed or scorpion’s tail to the leonine tail of the mount hybrid, suggest that the seal was produced in an Assyrian provincial centre, where local manufacture was exposed to imperial Assyrian works of art. Strategically located on a hill overlooking the coastal plain and probably controlling the road leading to the Shephelah, on the one hand, and to Jerusalem, on the other (Becking 1981–82: 79; Dever 1985: 217), Gezer became an important Assyrian centre during the late eighth and the seventh centuries (Dubovský 2006: 166). It is therefore not improbable that the new provincial cylinder seal was, in fact, made at the site. In this it is in keeping with other finds from Gezer that reveal strong Assyrian or Assyrianizing characteristics, which, indeed, confirm the role of Gezer as an Assyrian centre during the late eighth and the seventh centuries BCE.

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