



**University of  
Zurich**<sup>UZH</sup>

**Zurich Open Repository and  
Archive**

University of Zurich  
University Library  
Strickhofstrasse 39  
CH-8057 Zurich  
[www.zora.uzh.ch](http://www.zora.uzh.ch)

---

Year: 2023

---

## **Honoring a Legacy, Inviting a New Generation: A Very Brief Introduction to the Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant Project**

Uehlinger, Christoph

**Abstract:** The aim of this introductory article is threefold: (1) to situate the Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant (SSSL) project in the broader history of twentieth-century glyptic research, especially with regard to Othmar Keel's multi-volume *Corpus of Stamp Seals from Palestine/Israel*, launched in the 1980s; (2) to explain the SSSL project's research generational project, attentive to both transmission and innovation. *The Digital Humanities transition offers crucial oppor*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/727573>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-252550>

Journal Article

Accepted Version

Originally published at:

Uehlinger, Christoph (2023). Honoring a Legacy, Inviting a New Generation: A Very Brief Introduction to the Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant Project. *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 86(4):256-265.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/727573>

[Published in a special issue of *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 86 (4), 2023, 256–265 guest-edited by Nadia Ben-Marzouk and Ben Greet. See <https://www.asor.org/news/2023/12/nea86.4-toc/>]

## **HONORING A LEGACY, INVITING A NEW GENERATION: A VERY BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE *STAMP SEALS FROM THE SOUTHERN LEVANT* PROJECT**

*Abstract: The aim of this introductory article is threefold: (1) to situate the Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant (SSSL) project in the broader history of twentieth-century glyptic research, especially with regard to Othmar Keel's multi-volume Corpus of Stamp Seals from Palestine/Israel launched in the 1980s; (2) to explain the SSSL project's research design as a strategic response to that unfinished initiative, the intrinsic potential of stamp seals research and the demands of a specific funding opportunity which emphasizes interdisciplinarity; (3) to consider SSSL as a trans-generational project, attentive to both transmission and innovation. The Digital Humanities transition offers crucial opportunities and challenges regarding all three aspects.<sup>1</sup>*



Banner Photograph. The SSSL team visiting Othmar Keel at Fribourg University on February 9, 2022. From left to right: Bruno Biermann, Renate Fahrni, Eythan Levy, Silvia Schroer, Nadia Ben-Marzouk, Inbar Meirson, Christoph Uehlinger, Othmar Keel, Ido Koch, Noa Ranzer, Tatjana Beuthe, Michael Aeschlimann, Silas Klein Cardoso, Ben Greet, Fabio Porzia, Giulia Tucci, Stefan Münger (missing on the photo: Ingrid Berney, Mor Goldenberg, Ulrike Zurkinden-Kolberg and others). Photograph by Bruno Biermann.



Figure 1. Anatomy of a scarab beetle (*Scarabaeus sacer* L.) compared to stylized rendering on two scarab seal-amulets (CSSL Lachish nos. 312 [MB III] and 27 [early LB]). Numbered features: 1 head, 2 eyes, 3 antennae, 4 plates, 5 clypeus, 6 forelegs, 7 midlegs, 8 hindlegs, 9 tibiae, 10 tibial teeth, 11 femurs, 12 pronotum, 13 elytra, 14 suture, 15 humeral callosities, 16 crown, 17 scutellum (after Keel 1995: 20, fig. 1). Not all features were considered equally important by the scarab-producing craftspersons.

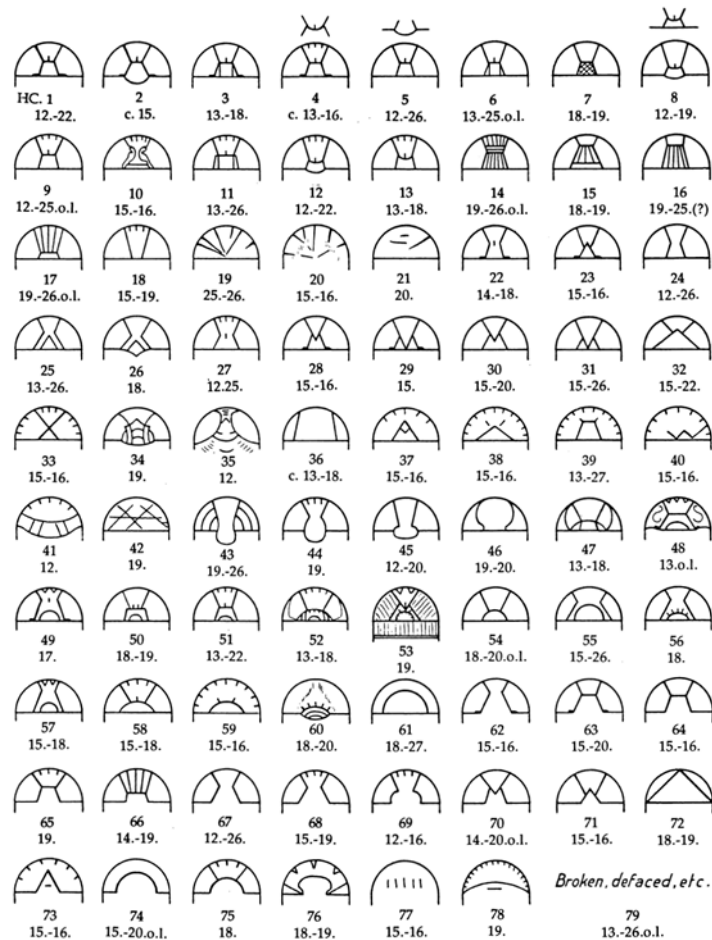


Figure 2. Scarab head types and their presumed chronological distribution (according to Egyptian dynasties) as suggested by Rowe (1936: pl. 32 = Keel 1995: 42, fig. 44).

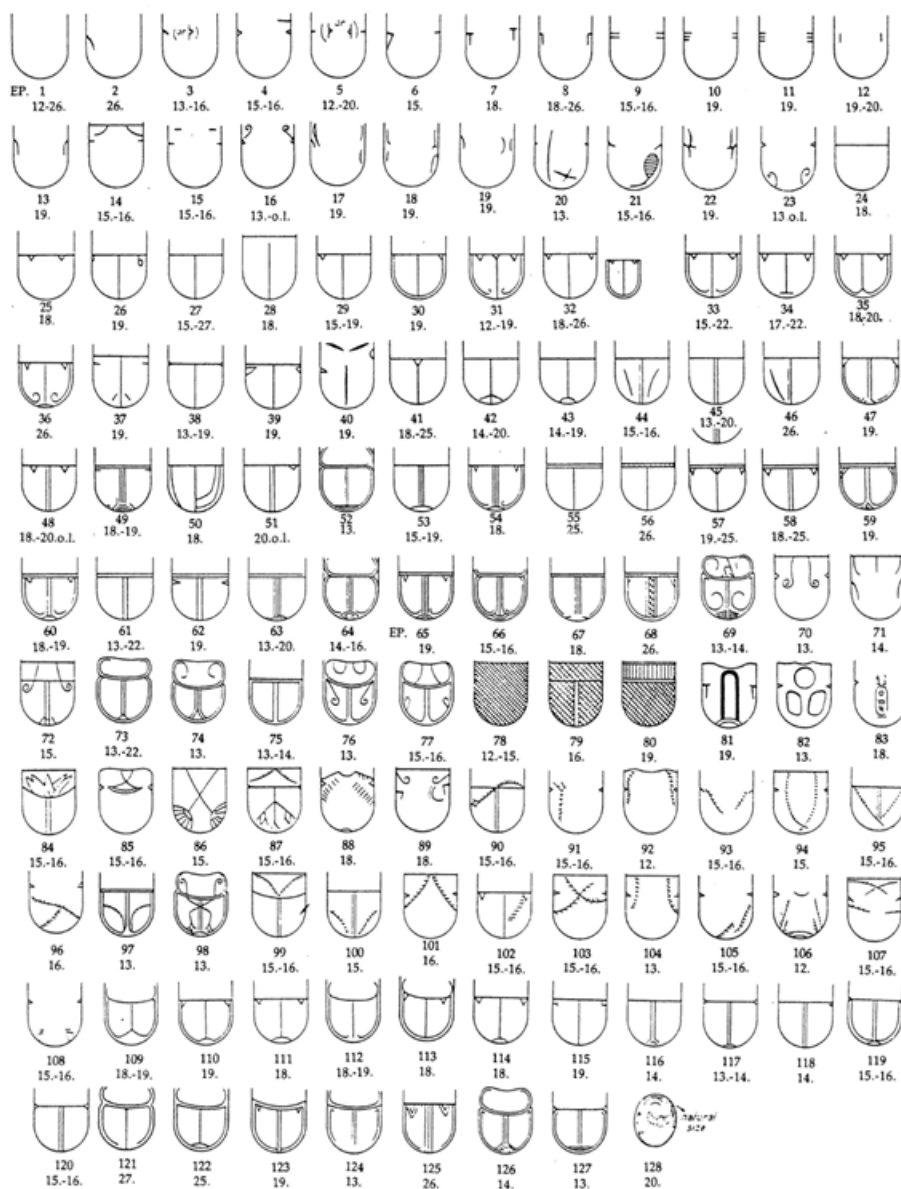


Figure 3. Scarab back types and their presumed chronological distribution (according to Egyptian dynasties) as suggested by Rowe (1936: pls. 33–34 = Keel 1995: 45, fig. 46).

Stamp seals have long attracted the interest of archaeologists working in Egypt and the southern Levant. Such attention is often due to their base designs (inscriptions and iconography), their peculiar characteristics of miniature dimensions, physical shape (from simple plaque to elaborate animal figure, most often a scarab beetle<sup>2</sup>, see fig. 1), material (local or imported, from easily available to luxury), and function (from practical and literal—to seal—to amulet or talisman) (see Uehlinger and Egger 2022 for an overview). Pioneers in stamp seals research include W. M. Flinders Petrie (1889; 1917), one of the founders of the modern archaeological exploration of Palestine, who used inscribed Egyptian royal name scarabs to date occupational layers, tombs and associated finds; Percy E. Newberry (1906; 1907), who first published extensive catalogues of scarabs from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo; Henry R. Hall (1913), who did the same for the scarabs of the British Museum; and Alan Rowe (1936), whose *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* offered a thorough chronological-typological scheme which—in spite of its relatively limited data and methodological shortcomings—remains an essential scholarly reference to this day (figs. 2–3).

The post-World War II period witnessed the rise of nation states in the region, resulting in an increasing sensitivity for distinguishing local/regional from imported productions, as well as describing periods of regional (“Canaanite”) socio-cultural autochthony as opposed to migration dynamics or periods of imperial hegemony.

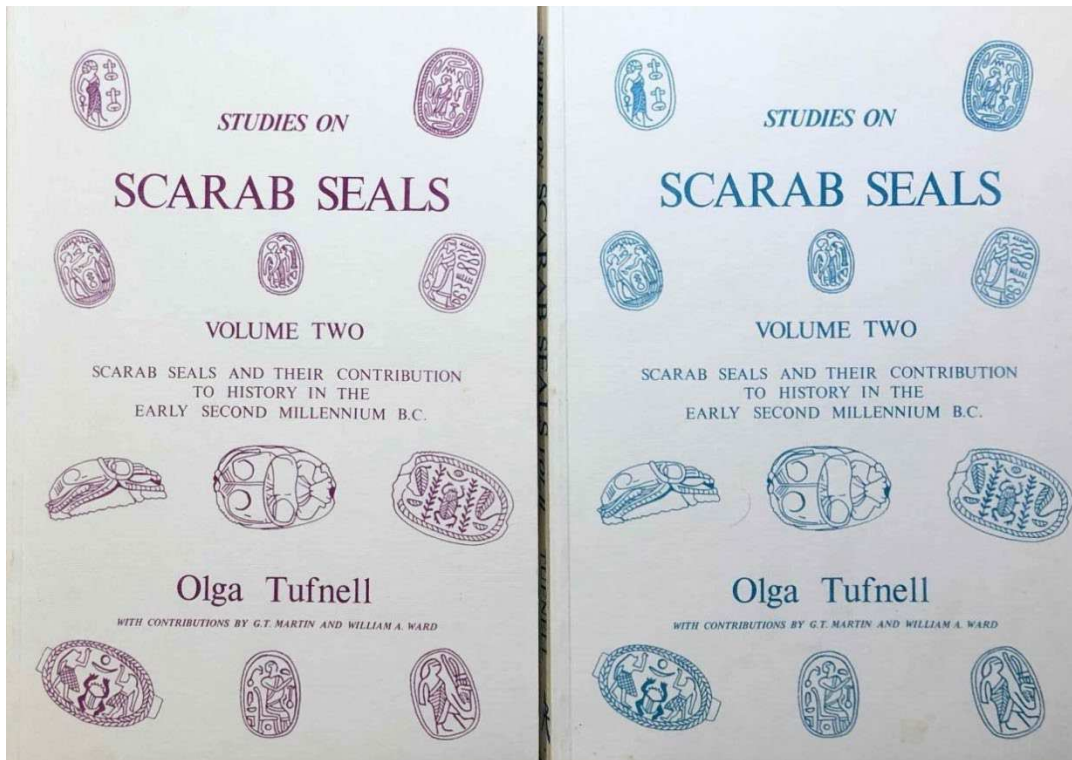


Figure 4. Olga Tufnell's groundbreaking *Studies on Scarab Seals...and their Contribution to History in the Early Second Millennium B.C.* (1984).

TYPENTAFEL I : STEATITSKARABÄEN

	Keine Trennung der Elytra	T	T	T	T	T
Ägyptische Typen	1	2	3	4	5	6
I		7			8	9
—und—						
nächst verwandte Stücke	10		11			
II			12			
Vorderasiatische Typen		13		14	15	16
III		17			18	19
		20				
Fraglich: östlich oder westlich	21	22			23	
IV	24				25	

Figure 5. Typology of early first-millennium steatite scarabs as suggested by Hölbl (1986: I 172–173 = Keel 1995: 58 fig. 70).

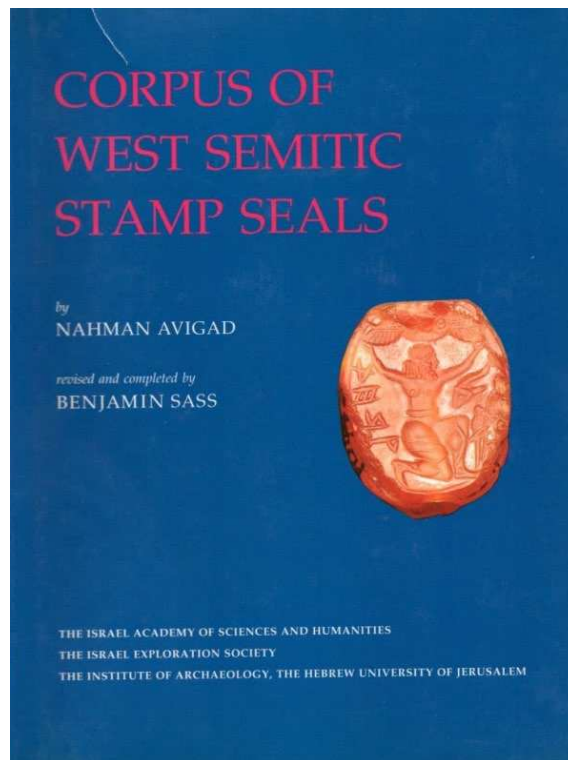


Figure 6. *WSS* (Avigad and Sass 1997), an unsurpassed companion for the study of Northwest Semitic inscribed seals.

As a result, and in line with an ever-increasing pool of data from stratigraphy-based excavations, glyptic scholarship became more specialized, with individual scholars often focusing on either Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, or Iron Age seals and seal impressions. William Ward’s *Studies on...Pre-12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Scarab Amulets* (1978) and Olga Tufnell’s *Studies on Scarab Seals...and their Contribution to History in the Early Second Millennium B.C.* (1984; see fig. 4), supplemented by Ward’s and Dever’s *Scarab Typology and Archaeological Context: An Essay on Middle Bronze Age Chronology* (1994) initiated a new era for the study of Middle Bronze age scarabs. Bertrand Jaeger’s groundbreaking study (1982) of scarabs displaying the Egyptian royal name *Men-kheper-Re* demonstrated that this throne name of 18<sup>th</sup>-dynasty king Thutmose III (r. 1479–1426) continued to be used in a variety of spellings and meanings (from royal name to cryptogram of Amun, the major deity of the Egyptian pantheon) for centuries (see below, fig. 9). As for Iron Age seals and seal impressions, two main strands of scholarship can be distinguished: one, spearheaded by Günther Hölbl, focuses on the distinction of Egyptian and Levantine, “eastern” and “western” types of scarabs and other stamp seals and tracks their diffusion and circulation throughout the Mediterranean (fig. 5); while the other, epigraphy-minded, rests on the distinction of Aramean, Phoenician, Hebrew (Israelite and/or Judahite), Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite and Philistean inscribed seals, a scheme epitomized in Nahman Avigad’s and Benjamin Sass’s *Corpus of West Semitic Seals* (1997; see fig. 6). Note that the majority of items catalogued in the latter publication are unprovenanced, but advances in field methodology are likely to improve that situation in the future.

With an ever-increasing amount of data due to hundreds of archaeological excavations operating with ever more sophisticated methodologies, correlations between seal typology, seal design, seal use and function, find contexts, and chronology have become increasingly complex and debated. Middle Bronze and Iron Age chronologies, hotly disputed over the past thirty years, affect the study of stamp seals, and to some degree *vice versa*: should Tell el-Dab‘a—the “Hyksos capital” and a reference site for the Second Intermediate Period in the Egyptian delta—be *the* chronological anchor for dating southern Levantine MB II sites and their glyptic productions as well? What role should Ashkelon, Dor, Gezer, Hazor, Jerusalem, Lachish, Megiddo, or Rehov—to name but a few prominent Iron Age sites—and their respective glyptic profiles play in defining the chronology and distribution of southern Levantine seal productions during the first millennium BCE? By the end of the twentieth century, the field seemed in need of a new orientation if not yet synthesis. While part of it was delivered in period-specific studies (such as Daphna Ben-Tor’s *Scarabs, Chronology, and Interconnections: Egypt and Palestine*



Figure 7. Keel's introductory volume to the German-language *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*, published in 1995, and the six catalogue volumes published between 1997 and 2017.

in the *Second Intermediate Period*, 2007), much insight remained somewhat hidden or known to only a few specialists, published in dozens of chapters in site-specific excavation reports or in scattered topical studies by such experts as Baruch Brandl, Othmar Keel or Vanessa Boschloo, to name a few among the most prolific scholars in the field.

#### A PROMISE AWAITING TO BE FULFILLED

Othmar Keel may be known to readers of this journal as a Swiss Hebrew Bible scholar whose work has long focused on the study of ancient Near Eastern imagery as a means to better understand the culturally coded symbolism embedded in biblical texts (see his ground-breaking *Symbolism of the Biblical World*). Driven by the quest to document images that could potentially have been available to inhabitants of the southern Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages, and not least to authors of biblical texts, Keel was attracted to the study of scarabs and other stamp seals since the mid-1970s. Facing the recurrent problem of data insufficiently documented and scattered over hundreds of publications, he launched the ambitious project to establish a *Corpus of Stamp Seal Amulets from Palestine/Israel*, assisted since 1981 by Karl Jaroš, Bertrand Jaeger, and others, and supported over many years by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Initially planned as a six-year endeavor, the project proved to be far more complex and time-consuming than anticipated. Nevertheless, it did materialize (see figs. 7–8) in a detailed introductory volume (published in 1995), five massive volumes counting more than 7000 stamp seals and seal impressions from 131 sites ranging alphabetically from A (starting with Tell Abu Farağ) to K (Tel Kitan; 1997–2017), a companion volume produced with Jürg Egger that numbers another 700+ seals and seal impressions (including cylinder seals) from 92 sites in Jordan (2006), and four volumes titled *Studies on Stamp Seals from Palestine/Israel* (1985–1994). The project also provided the indispensable database for a more synthetic, iconography-based study focusing on religio-historical developments from the Middle Bronze Age to the Persian period (Keel and Uehlinger 1998). Altogether, these works established Keel's reputation as perhaps the leading expert in Levantine stamp seals research at the turn of the century.

Yet the promise of a comprehensive *Corpus* remains to be fulfilled. Think of major sites whose names start with letters L to Z (e.g., Lachish, Megiddo, Tell en-Naṣbeh/Mizpa, Reḥov, Samaria, Shechem, Taanach). Consider hundreds of new finds discovered over the past 25 years from sites addressed in the volumes already

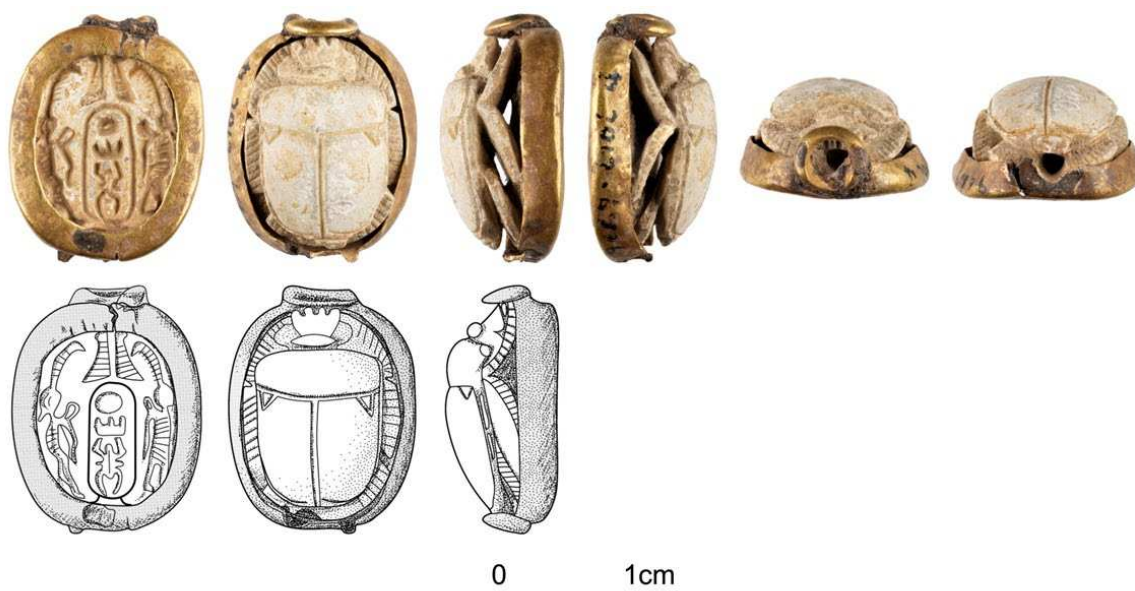


Figure 9. Enstatite scarab from Lachish with a mounting made of gold; the base engraving shows two outward-facing prisoners flanking a feather-topped cartouche spelling out the royal name *Men-kheper-Re*. This is the prenomen of 18<sup>th</sup>-dynasty king Thutmose III (r. 1479–1426), but the scarab was produced a century or two later during the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty. New high-resolution photography by Ben Greet courtesy of the Oriental Museum, Durham University, interpreted in new drawings by Ingrid Berney (Durham University, Oriental Museum, Inv. No. DUROM.1964.668; CSSL Lachish no. 608).

published (A–K), to which add dozens of new sites and recent publications that need to be taken into account. When we consider items from sites L–Z west and east of the Jordan river, plus all addenda, the number of items remaining to be part of a truly comprehensive corpus counts up to more than 3000.

#### A FOLLOW-UP PROJECT

It is to that end (and more, see below) that Ido Koch, Stefan Münger, Silvia Schroer and Christoph Uehlinger conceived a new project entitled *Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant* (SSSL), which is the object of this special issue of *NEA*. None of us would have dared to take up the challenge laid out by Keel more than forty years ago single-handed; and none would claim to have the same overview and control of the material as Keel (and a handful of other specialists, for that matter). Yet we thought that it was definitely worth a try in association. Several attempts to obtain funding for a “simple” rescue operation proved impossible; today’s funding programs are not designed to complete unfinished business, so to speak. When the Swiss National Science Foundation offered a new funding line called “Sinergia,” however, applying there appeared to be a promising option.

In line with similar programs of comparable funding agencies in other countries, “Sinergia” requires a specific organizational format, emphasizes interdisciplinarity (in our case: archaeology, biblical studies, history of religion/s), and solicits the applying consortium’s ambition to produce research that might qualify as “break-through,” “high risk/high reward,” and the like. Unsurprisingly, the program is highly selective, and success rates suggest that it fits sciences better than humanities. To put things mildly, the average humanities applicant will need to somehow overestimate the size of their shoes.

For the SSSL project and its core concern to complete the publication of Keel’s *Corpus*, “Sinergia” represented a kind of “now or never” opportunity. As usual in such circumstances, the challenge was to secure the somewhat precarious core by surrounding it with a coherent structure of sub-projects responding to the typical concerns of the funding line. The latter reflects in the project’s subtitle, which envisions stamp seals as *A multifaceted prism for studying entangled histories in an interdisciplinary perspective*. In the following paragraphs, I want to explain that this subtitle is more than a chain of fashionable buzzwords.





Figure 10. An exceptional seal-type, the bezel being part of a fibula that also includes a bird of prey and a Pazuzu head. Found in Megiddo's Str. IVA/III city gate, the object typically reflects Assyrian presence in the Southern Levant during the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE (Jerusalem, The Rockefeller Museum, IAA No. 1936.930, photographed anew by Clara Amit courtesy the Israel Antiquities Authority, drawing by Ulrike Zurkinden-Kolberg; CSSL Megiddo no. 298).

#### A MULTI-FACETED PRISM...

A characteristic (and serious asset) of stamp seals (even more when they are preserved in their original mounting, such as the scarab of fig. 9) is their unusual potential, due to the combination of small scale with a high degree of informativity, to provoke curiosity and thus invite experts and laypersons alike to raise questions such as: What kind of objects are these in the first place? Why do so many of them take the shape of a beetle? Why are there other shapes as well (e.g., human-headed, animal-shaped, or purely stereometric such as oval plaques, ovoids, or conoids)? Were these produced and/or used alongside each other, or only during certain periods in particular regions? Does shape correlate with function, so that, for example, some items would have functioned as beads or amulets and talismans rather than seals? When objects are covered by thick glazing, for instance, sealing would have been virtually impossible. Looking at base engravings, which can include purely geometric designs, relatively complex figurative scenes, and/or inscriptions mentioning names, titles, or formulae, the most candid beholder will ask whether their "meaning" can be decoded. And they will raise standard questions like "Where was this found? Who made it, for whom, and when? For what purpose?" Few stamp seals come with such clear indications of multi-functionality as that 8<sup>th</sup>-century fibula found at the city-gate of Megiddo Str. IVA or III, which combined mundane purpose (to hold in place a piece of garment) with apotropaic protection (fig. 10).

Researchers come up with their own questions, which sometimes follow the paths of more than a century of scholarship as far too briefly sketched above: how can this material best be classified, what features should we consider as the most pertinent classifiers, what kind of typologies should we construe? How can classification and typology help us to establish chronological sequences, to identify groups or, once identified, allow us to locate a probable place of production together with an area of distribution? Typology in conjunction with stratigraphically established chronology and historical geography were the main concern of studies on scarab seals published in the 1980s and 1990s, and they continue for good reasons to impact research agendas until this day.

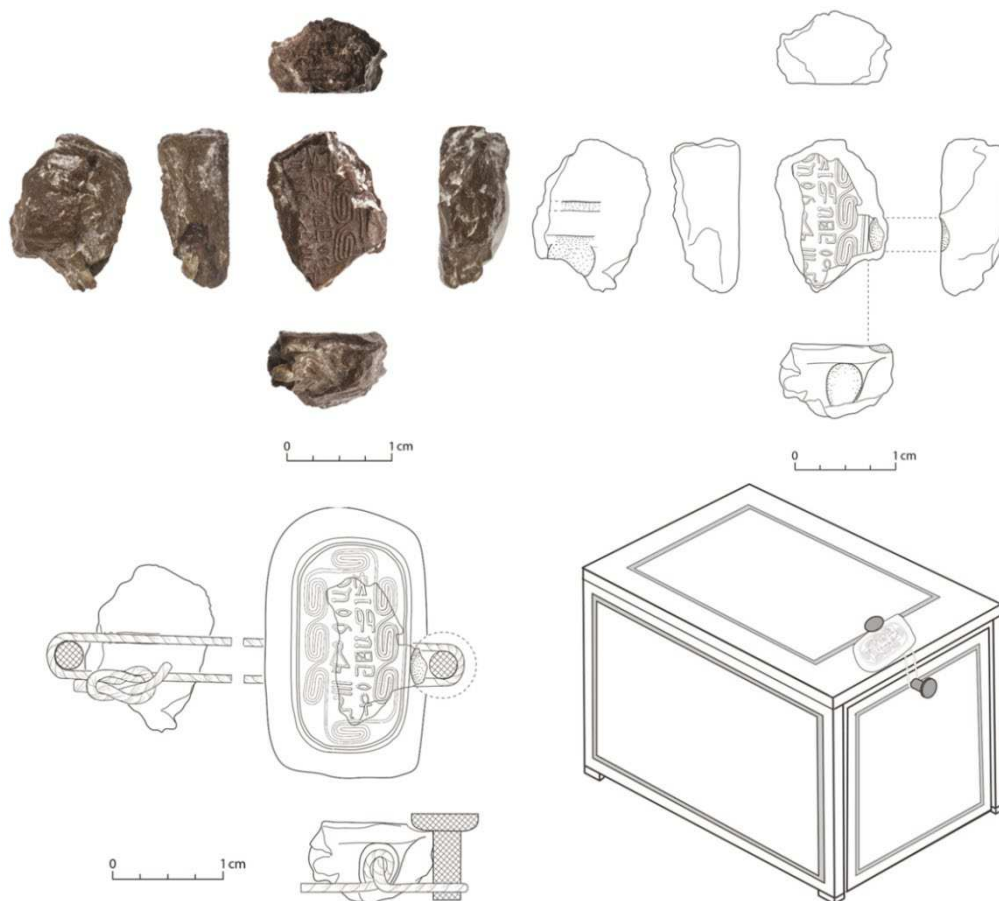


Figure 11. A recently-published impression of a Middle Kingdom (= MB II A) seal, found in a Hellenistic fill in Jerusalem’s “City of David”, Area D3: note how multiple photographic views and drawings can assist a visual interpretation of the seal’s and sealing’s ancient use (Ben-Dor Evian 2019: figs. 2, 6 and 7; photographs by Tal Rogovski, drawings by Carmen Hersch, functional reconstruction by Baruch Brandl; CSSL Jerusalem no. 523).

More recently, as a result of new technologies allowing sophisticated non-destructive analysis at reasonable cost, the field has started to pursue more science-driven questions, regarding for instance the precise determination of a seal’s material and composition, the reconstruction of a *chaîne opératoire* followed in a seal’s production, the identification of tools used in the production based on high-resolution photography, 3D scans, and microscope analysis that allow to observe the most minute details and traces, and many more. The more sophisticated the tools used to document, observe, and study the material, the more specific the associated research questions will be, producing a virtually unending feedback loop for increasingly complex research designs. Finally, I should mention that the study of ancient seals has long been led in conjunction with the study of ancient seal impressions.<sup>3</sup> Although the latter are but the trace of the former and differ from them in many respects, the information that can be retrieved from the scientific analyses of sealings is obviously crucial for a better understanding of the seals’ use and functions, too (see fig. 11). Ancient seal impressions open different avenues of inquiry, generally focused on the clay (from bulla through locking devices to tablets or handles) on which a seal was impressed, which clay may preserve the imprints of the sealing fingers (and thus invite types of analysis known from forensic inquiry), of strings, papyrus, cloth, wood or other materials. Recent scientific studies have started to determine clay composition, or age through the study of earth magnetism at the time of firing, etc.

...FOR STUDYING ENTANGLED HISTORIES...

Like any specialized field of modern research, the study of ancient seals and seal impressions has developed its own, at times idiosyncratic, habitus, sets of questions, and terminology to the extent that it may appear somewhat opaque or esoteric to the non-initiated. Basically, however, most students of ancient seals and seal impressions

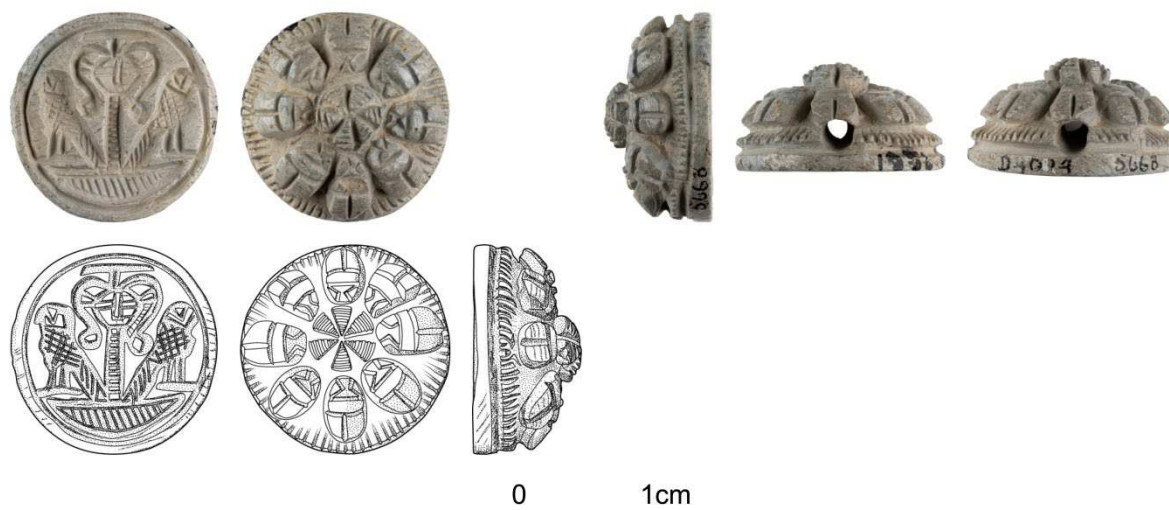


Figure 12. A spectacular stamp seal from a transitional MB III / LB tomb (Cave 4004) at Lachish. The round shape gives it the appearance of a knob, whose back showing a series of eight scarabs meeting around a central knob made of six detached sections is sculpted with exceptional refinement. The base engraving shows a so-called ‘Hathor symbol’ on a palm trunk, a feature always depicted frontally, here flanked by two birds, possibly falcons, over a hatched ground segment that may or may not refer to the Egyptian *nb* (or “ruler”) hieroglyph. New high-resolution photography by Ben Greet courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, interpreted in new drawings by Ingrid Berney (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Inv. No. 1955.503(23); CSSL Lachish no. 399).

deal with material history, like most of their fellow archaeologists and many historians. History adds to the previously mentioned questions as it is first and foremost interested in what ancient artifacts may tell us about ancient human actors, their social, economic, political status and organization, connections and interrelations, their lives and lores including their cultural, or religious, imaginary.

Stamp seals inform on all these on various levels of inquiry: the very raw material they are made of may be of local extraction or composition, or imported from distant regions. It stands to reason that only a limited proportion of excavated stamp seals were actually produced at the site where they were found. More often than not, stamp seals would have traveled with producers or intermediaries to close or distant destinations, linking place of origin, networks of diffusion, and place of final deposition in a large array of entangled histories—be they conceived as object biographies, histories of interconnecting networks of exchange, or asymmetric histories of colonizing powers exercising political, administrative, and symbolic hegemony over one or several regions of the southern Levant.

Stamp seals can inform many different types of history: social and economic history in the first place, but also political, cultural and religious history, most clearly when seal designs show kings smiting enemies, hunting wild animals, or performing ritual obligations towards their gods and goddesses. Would the image of an Egyptian king evoke only political supremacy, or tell other stories such as the king being the supreme human, a (*the*) mediator between humans and the gods, the single this-worldly authority able to repel enemies, wild animals and other chaotic forces? Many stamp seals seem intimately related to such concepts and imagery, which in the virtual absence of more formal, not to say monumental iconography from the region makes them an unusually talkative medium to study ancient worldviews and “beliefs.” Take as another example the spectacular masterpiece shown in fig. 12, from a transitional late Middle Bronze to Late Bronze Age tomb at Lachish: particularly sophisticated, it appropriates Egyptian symbolism in a resolutely “Canaanite” fashion, yet does so with almost playful virtuosity. Imagine that piece re-contextualized (with all other materials found in that same tomb, or only the particular burial it belonged to), but also put into perspective by situating it in a long series of scarabs showing the so-called “Hathor symbol”: this is a history that continuously oscillates between macro and micro, wide interconnections and minute adaptations, and whose heroes so to speak are craftspersons and their clients.

Histories are produced by contemporary scholars, so we should always ask through what kind of historical lens *we* address our data. To give another example, approaching the history and material culture of the southern Levant during the Iron Age II with the paradigm of territorially defined polities or “nations” in mind will tend to produce “national” histories, “national” cultural properties, and histories of “nationally” defined religions. Are such constructs evidence-based or do they simply reflect our prior assumptions? When analyzed in terms of groups

with peculiar distribution patterns, stamp seals may provide a useful dataset to evaluate and possibly challenge the pertinence of the paradigm and of our classificatory practices, and they certainly help to question the paradigm's all-encompassing application to the political, economic, cultural, and religious history of the region during the Iron Age II.

Finally, in a certain sense, the *Corpus* project itself has become an object of historical study when we look back at almost fifty years of research and consider, for instance, the tremendous changes in media and information technology during this period. When Keel set out to establish his *Corpus*, the concept of “digital native” had not yet been invented.

### ...IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

Glyptic studies represent a highly specialized field of research, but its practitioners connect to a great variety of disciplines within the broad spectrum of ancient world studies: archaeology, art history, ancient Near Eastern studies, Egyptology, biblical studies, history (including gender history), history of religion\,s, and more. Many of these are connected to other domains by virtue of theory and/or method, such as anthropology, sociology, media studies, visual and material culture studies, cultural studies, and others; or they increasingly draw on the sciences and their potential to reframe or redefine the questions and horizons of contemporary research in the humanities. As indicated above, growing intercourse with the sciences will offer new perspectives to the future study of ancient stamp seals and seal impressions as well.

Within the SSSL project, interdisciplinarity is first reflected by the disciplines represented among its core staff and directors: archaeology, Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern studies, biblical studies, and history of religion\,s. It is further reflected in the modules that surround and support the project's core concern (the *Corpus of Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant* [or CSSL]), each of which—so we thought at the time of application—should be studied by a junior researcher (at doctoral or postdoc level):

- Core concern: basic research on corpus and database
- Political, social, and economic history: stamp seals and interconnections
- Local and regional profiles and traditions: assessment and comparison
- Distribution of stamp seal motifs in the southern Levant
- Social archaeology: context and functions of southern Levantine stamp seals
- Seals and sealing in gender-historical perspective
- History of religion\,s: new perspectives on the history of ancient Levantine religion\,s in the second and first millennia BCE
- Biblical studies: assessing “iconographic exegesis”

Staff positions were broadly advertised, and the subsequent job interviews resulted in a highly interdisciplinary and unusually international team of talented junior researchers, who represent no less than nine different countries of origin and primary academic socialization (Belgium, Brazil, Canada, England, Germany, Israel, Italy, Switzerland, United States). Their various academic backgrounds, previous research trajectories and personalities have almost naturally impacted the course taken by the modules over the past three years. Their contributions in the following chapters will give readers a sense of where their work within the SSSL project has led them so far.

### MOVING FORWARD INTO DIGITAL HUMANITIES

As mentioned, the initial impetus for the SSSL project was a commitment to bring Keel's *Corpus* to completion. To that end, the project will produce three or more additional printed volumes which, by 2024, will possibly close the book era of the *Corpus*. One of the most important aspects of the project, however, is the need and will to simultaneously accomplish a sustainable Digital Humanities transition. To begin with, the wealth of information contained in the *Corpus* volumes will be made available, via a digital database, to scholars and interested laypersons worldwide. Our goal is to offer the scholarly community a sustainable web-based database solution that should be open access, collaborative, and expandable: the former by inviting colleagues to actively participate in the ongoing development of the database; the latter, by the possibility to offer alternative interpretations for existing entries, but also to contribute new entries in order to keep the database up-to-date.

Initially based on a template inspired by the published *Corpus* volumes and their relatively straightforward rubrics (object, base, dating, find context, bibliography), the CSSL database has over the past three years been developed by Stefan Münger from a rather basic repository into a complex and powerful research tool in its own right, which surpasses by far the possibilities of a conventional book publication. It differs in many respects from its analogue predecessor by increasingly detailed and sophisticated rubrics and functions that all serve the three basic operations of description, analysis, and interpretation. Refinements resulted from our staff's active engagement with the database, prompting new questions and demands based on the needs of the above-mentioned research modules. The database's technicalities, possibilities, and constant evolution are described in a separate contribution by Nadia Ben-Marzouk, Ben Greet, Ido Koch, and Stefan Münger.

## THE NEXT GENERATION

More than 40 years have passed since the inception of Keel's *Corpus* project. Not unlike other projects of comparable ambition, this one has experienced some stop-and-go's due to personal trajectories and institutional contingencies. After his retirement in 2002, Keel continued to work on the *Corpus* almost single-handedly, without the institutional support a professorship offers in terms of infrastructure, staffing, or funding opportunities. Concerns of how that legacy could be saved for the future led to various initiatives, one being Bible+Orient Database Online conceived and implemented by Jürg Egger and Thomas Staubli at Keel's home university at Fribourg, Switzerland. BODO (see <https://bodo.unifr.ch/bodo/>) is a highly useful digital repository of all the data published in the extant *Corpus* volumes, which can be searched online alongside other data not necessarily related to stamp seals research. SSSL and the CSSL database differ from BODO in focus and aim, their core task being to get Keel's *Corpus* finished and move beyond.

Three out of four directors of the SSSL project are former students and long-time collaborators of Keel. When we conceived SSSL some years ago, we were motivated by a mix of ambitions and motivations; not the least was a sense of loyalty toward a charismatic scholar who over the years had turned from teacher to colleague and friend. Another strong motivation came from the awareness that contemporary archaeological and historical research on stamp seals from the southern Levant finds itself at a critical juncture today, the most important factors being the Digital Humanities transition and increasing exposure to science. That juncture (and altogether new challenges appearing with Artificial Intelligence) will have to be negotiated by younger generations of scholars. Having always thought of SSSL as a trans-generational project, I am happy to report that this project's implementation over the past three and a half year has been just that: an impressive experience of mutual learning. Another generation of scholars is ready to take over. Their work will lead us far beyond the *Corpus*, and no doubt beyond SSSL as well.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant* (duration: 2020–2023) is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation, Sinergia project grant CRSII5\_186426. The consortium's participating universities include the University of Bern, Tel Aviv University, and the University of Zurich as the project's leading house. For a concise summary and the project's 2022 intermediate report, see <https://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/en/forschung/projekte/SINERGIA-project.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Based on currently available data, scarabs make up 72.5% of the more than 10,000 provenanced stamp seals from the southern Levant.

<sup>3</sup> Seal impressions make up ca. 15% (or 1'777 out of 11'810 items) currently registered in our database.

## REFERENCES

- Avigad, Nahman and Benjamin Sass. 1997. *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Ben-Tor, Daphna. 2007. *Scarabs, Chronology, and Interconnections: Egypt and Palestine in the Second Intermediate Period*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 27. Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/137119/>
- CSSL = Corpus of Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant Online Database [[cssl.levantineseals.org](https://cssl.levantineseals.org)]

- Eggler, Jürg and Othmar Keel. 2006. *Corpus der Siegel-Amulette aus Jordanien. Vom Neolithikum bis zur Perserzeit*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 25. Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/137127/>
- Hall, H.R. 1913. *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Etc., in the British Museum. Vol. I: Royal Scarabs*. London: The British Museum. <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofegypt00hall>
- Hölbl, Günther. 1986. *Ägyptisches Kulturgut im phönikischen und punischen Sardinien*. Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain 102. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill.
- Jaeger, Bertrand. 1982. *Essai de classification et datation des scarabées Menkhéperre*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 2. Fribourg: Editions Universitaires and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/151978/>
- Keel, Othmar. 1978. *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. London: SPCK and New York: Seabury Press (repr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997; German original 1972).
- . 1995. *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Einleitung*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 10. Fribourg: Universitätsverlag and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/142326/>
- . 1998–2017. *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Katalog Vols. I–V*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 13, 29, 31, 33, 35. Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. <https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/136930/>, 136778, 137116, 142340, 152239
- Keel, Othmar and Christoph Uehlinger. 1998. *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress and Edinburgh: T&T Clark (German original 1992).
- Newberry, P.E. 1906. *Scarabs: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian Seals and Signet Rings*. London: Archibald Constable. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/59233>
- Petrie, W.M.F. 1889. *Historical Scarabs: A Series of Drawings from the Principal Collections, Arranged Chronologically*. London: Nutt.
- . 1917. *Scarabs and Cylinders with Names: Illustrated by the Egyptian Collection in University College, London*. British School of Archaeology in Egypt 29. London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt.
- Rowe, Alan. 1936. *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum*. Le Caire: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.
- Tufnell, Olga. 1984. *Studies on Scarab Seals. Vol. II: Scarab Seals and their Contribution to History in the Early Second Millennium B.C.* 2 vols. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
- Uehlinger, Christoph and Jürg Eggler. 2022. "Seals and sealings", pp. 832–861 in *Encyclopedia of the Material Culture of the Biblical World*. Eds. Angelika Berlejung, P. M. Michelle Daviau, Jens Kamlah and Gunnar Lehmann. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Ward, William A. 1978. *Studies on Scarab Seals. Vol. I: Pre-12th Dynasty Scarab Amulets*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
- Ward, William A. and William G. Dever. 1994. *Studies on Scarab Seals. Vol. III: Scarab Typology and Archaeological Context. An Essay on Middle Bronze Age Chronology*. San Antonio, TX: Van Siclen.

**Christoph Uehlinger** has been a professor in History of Religions/Comparative Religion at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, since 2003. Trained in biblical studies, some Egyptology and ancient Near Eastern studies, he specializes in the study of ancient Levantine visual culture, media economies, and interregional contact and knowledge transfer. He has published several monographs and edited volumes, among them *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God* (1998, with Othmar Keel), *Images as Media* (2000), and *Crafts and Images in Contact* (2005, ed. with Claudia Suter), as well as numerous articles and book chapters. Senior editor of the *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* series, he currently serves as the co-ordinating director of *Stamp Seals from the Southern Levant*, a Sinergia project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.