

The
Archaeology and
Art of
Ancient Egypt

Essays in Honor of David B. O'Connor



Volume II

Edited by
Zahi A. Hawass
and Janet Richards



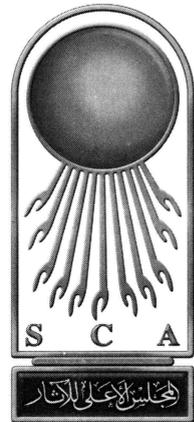
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ANNALES DU SERVICE DES ANTIQUITÉS DE L'ÉGYPTE
CAHIER N° 36

Volume II

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PUBLICATIONS DU CONSEIL SUPRÊME DES ANTIQUITÉS DE L'ÉGYPTE

Graphic Designer
Lourie, Margaret A.

Director of Printing
Safwat, Amal

(CASAE 36) 2007

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Dar el Kutub No. 5576/2007
ISBN-10 977-437-241-7
ISBN-13 987-977-437-241-4
ISSN 5576/2007

IMPRIMERIE DU CONSEIL SUPRÊME DES ANTIQUITÉS

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“Water Carrier” or the Like in the Ancient Egyptian Sources and Its Resemblance to Dilmun Glyptic Art¹

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The focus of this paper will be a survey and analysis of varying Egyptian daily life scenes in which a motif of a man, or sometimes two men, are shown bearing a pole on their shoulders from which are suspended two large pots (or in other forms and purposes, a “wine-drinking scene”). These scenes will be compared with contemporaneous artifacts from archaeological sites of the western side of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and from Mesopotamia. The possible connection between the idea of “water carrier” and garden irrigation in Egyptian art with those scenes of Dilmun-type seals relating to the god Inzak (or Inki, the god of subterranean water and the related myth of Gilgamesh) will be discussed. Finally, the possibility that vessels carried by a man/men are either for personal use or for a gift presented to a ruling king or god will be considered.

Water Carrier in Ancient Egyptian Art

The hieroglyphic word *irp* (𓆎) means wine (GARDINER 1982: 554). Moreover, the word *k3nw* (𓆎𓆏) is known as garden and *k3ny* (𓆎𓆏𓆏) or *k3ny* (𓆎𓆏𓆏𓆏) for gardener (GARDINER 1982: 597). Sen-nedjesi held various administrative titles—as illustrated in his tomb at Dendera—in addition to his position as the Governor of Nome, such as Overseer of the House, Treasurer of the Lower Egyptian King and the title of *k3ny*, Gardener. *k3ny* is exceptionally written here with the ideogram depicting a man carrying water for the garden (FISCHER 1968: 154–55).

Egyptian sites, such as an 18th Dynasty private tomb at Qurneh, have yielded intact examples of jars (vessels) attached to a large pole; in the Qurneh tomb, this artifact was found beside a coffin (Fig. 1 a–b; PETRIE 1909: pls. 23–24). A stick, roughly trimmed at the knots but with the bark remaining, is 50.8 inches long and hanging from it are ten nets that had been strung to hold a ceramic vessel. A bare interval on the stick showed the space where it had been carried on the shoulder (PETRIE 1909: pls. 23–24).

Moreover, Meket-Re’s miniature treasure shows household servants in the act of baking bread,



Fig. 1a: Intact burial of the 18th dynasty at Qurneh (PETRIE 1909: pl. XXIII).



Fig. 1b: Detail, pottery in nets attached to stick (PETRIE 1909: pl. XIV).

brewing beer and skinning oxen. A servant is shown carrying a pole, resting on his shoulders, and two jars filled more likely not with water but with beer (STEWART 1979: 116).

The depiction of a man carrying, on his shoulders, two large water jars suspended from a yoke is shown sporadically in the various daily life scenes in private Egyptian tombs such as that of Mereruka in Saqqara (STROUHAL 1992: 100; KEMP 1989: 13, fig. 3). Reliefs in the Old Kingdom tombs of Ni-ankh-khnum and Khnum-hotep at Saqqara depict similar scenes (MANNICHE 1989: 113).

The scene of transporting the great statue of Djehuty-hotep, Governor of el-Bersheh, includes three figures who each carry on their shoulders a yoke with two vessels. These figures probably relate to another person who is leaning down and pouring water or, more likely, milk, to facilitate the movement of the wooden cylindrical blocks underneath the sledge (Fig. 2; FAKHRY 1974: 24, fig. 5). A hieroglyphic word written above those figures is in the form of *ḥi inw* which is probably derived from v. 3 inf. *ḥi* (𓆎𓆏𓆑), meaning to raise or lift up (FAULKNER 1972: 97).

In addition to that, there is an interesting daily life scene in Rekhmire's Theban tomb (100), at Qurneh, illustrating cargo being unloaded from boats. Depicted in the scene are huge Egyptian storage jars for wine (or possibly oil) and bundles of papyrus, destined for warehouses in the temple of Amen at Karnak (WILKINSON and HILL 1983: 38, n. 34 [30.4.151]). There are two workmen trying to carry a large vessel, probably filled with wine or beer, which hangs by a rope on a pole resting on their shoulders. A similar scene, which includes three more people who have already lifted their jars

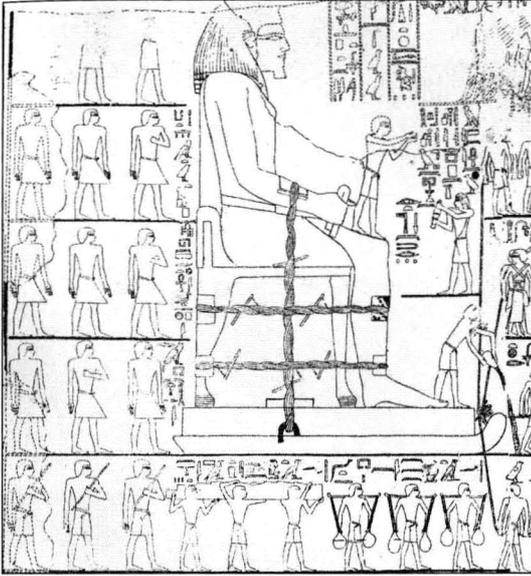


Fig. 2: Transporting of Djehuty-hotep's statue (after NEWBERRY 1894-5 Vol I: pl. 15).

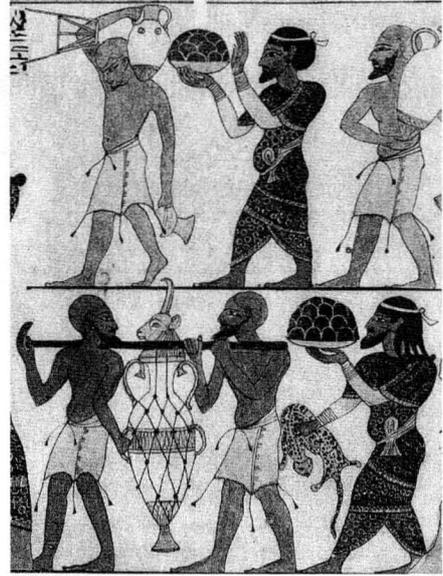


Fig. 3: Men carrying a large jar suspended from a yoke (after DE GARIS DAVIES and GARDINER 1926: pl. XIX).

on their shoulders while the fourth one is still trying to raise up his jar, is depicted in another private Theban tomb. The exception here is that they have filled their jars with water from a pool surrounded by a garden (LYIÖD 1988: 183, fig. 133). The motif of a raised jar resting on a man's shoulder is shown in a modified form on a wooden toilet or perfume ladle (Louvre Museum, dated to either the 18th or 19th Dynasty), in which a servant girl carries a jar on her shoulder (ROSS 1931: 181).

In a private tomb at Saqqara, a scene shows the tomb owner standing and in front of him are registers depicting daily life. The registers include a herd of animals moving towards a scribe in the act of recording and an image of a herdsman pushing his cattle forwards. The herdsman carries on his left shoulder, and holds with his left hand, a stick with two jugs hanging from its farthest end. It is likely that these two jugs are filled with water for his own use, rather than for presentation to his master (QUIBELL 1912: pl. XVI).

In the private Theban tomb of Benia (called Pahekmemy, Overseer of Works and Child of Nursery, 18th Dynasty [TT 343]) the owner is shown seated before a table of offerings and inspects the offering bearers (cattle, birds, fish, lotus flowers and a variety of food distributed on three registers). In the lower register of that scene two people are depicted carrying a large jar surrounded by a rope and suspended from a yoke resting on their shoulders. It is likely that the jar was filled with either wine or oil as an offering to the tomb owner (SILIOTTI 2000: 159). In a similar manner, in the daily life scenes of the tomb of Khaemwese at Thebes and in connection with the unloading of boats' shipments, two people carry a large jar surrounded by a rope and suspended from a yoke resting on their shoulders. Another person is shown on deck gripping with both hands a large jar that rests on his shoulder while he descends from the boat (JAMES 1986: 14-15). A tribute scene in the tomb of Huy (TT 40), Viceroy of Nubia during the reign of Tutankhamen, includes offering bearers ferrying a large jar suspended to a yoke, probably filled with wine to be presented to the ruling king (Fig. 3; MANNICHE 1987: 46, fig. 39). The same action is repeated in the daily

life scenes of Puyemre, in which two people are shown, in a production scene out of the oases region, carrying a heavy jar suspended in a rope net from a yoke (BIETAK and REISER-HASLAUER 1982: s. 214, Abb. 116).

Moreover, a good example of a "town house" is known in the daily life scenes from Djehutynefer's tomb at Thebes. Two servants are shown carrying a large jar hanging by a rope connecting the jar's handles to a pole resting on their shoulders while another servant is ascending, carrying with two hands a large jar that rests on his shoulder. The servants will be inspected and recorded by scribes before they put aside their burdens, together with the other provisions depicted in five storage bins (STEAD 1986: 10, n. 9). In addition to that, in the daily life scenes of the Theban tomb of Antefeker, there is a procession of servants speeding on their way and among them is one who carries two large jars surrounded by a rope net and suspended from a yoke while another one carries a yoke that supports a jar on one side while the other side supports a large open plate filled with items probably related to preparing food for the master (VANDIER 1964: 814, figs. 457, 2, XXXI).

The stele of Sebek (BM no. 1372; 60 cm in height) shows a number of household slaves employed in carrying food and baking bread. A servant is shown carrying, from a yoke resting on his shoulder, a large jar which hangs at a lower level than the open basket on the other end of the yoke (STEAD 1986: 22, n. 28). It is probably carried for the personal use of the servant, rather than for his master.

A wall painting in the private Theban tomb of Ipy (TT 217; 19th Dynasty) preserves a scene of a gardener at work. He is shown pulling water out of a canal to irrigate the garden by using a shaduf, or well-sweep. A leather basket hangs by a rope from the end of a pole that is counterbalanced by a mass of limestone. The pole pivots on a support of whitewashed mud (MANNICHE 1987: 118; ALDRED 1972: fig. 10). Similar scenes of the irrigation of land by shadufs are known in the daily life scenes of the Amarna period from the tomb of Nefer-hotep at Thebes (BUTZER 1976: 44, fig. 8).

Moreover, a drawing of a relief in the tomb of the artist Niankhptah, Saqqara, c. 2450 BCE, shows the tomb owner in one of his daily life scenes, taking a repast, while boatmen fight on the water. His servant is lifting up towards his lips a jar filled with water, as if presenting water to be drunk by his master (ALDRED 1980: 80, fig. 47). In another daily life scene in the tomb of Mery I, at Hagarseh, a servant is depicted on a higher level, near to the face of his master, and is shown presenting water to him in an open bowl, with his left hand, while he holds a jug in his right hand (PETRIE 1908: pl. IX).

Similar Scenes of Water Carriers in Egyptian Art but with Different Motifs (Birds, Fish, Ropes, Sacks)

The idea of depicting a man bearing on his shoulder a yoke with two large pots, or jars, is repeated in a different way in daily life scenes. It was represented sometimes, instead of pots or vessels, as a man (or men) carrying away boxes filled with fowl or fish, baskets filled with different objects, and so on.

It is interesting to note among those scenes of the 5th Dynasty the image of an aged man with a thin face and an emaciated chest, to the degree that we notice his bones as if they are emerging from his chest, carrying a pole over his shoulders from which two baskets(?) are hanging and filled with offerings (SHOUKRI n.d.: photo 141).

In addition to that, Ihy, Overseer of Linen, is shown in the layout of the daily life scenes in Ptah-hotep's tomb at Saqqara, dated to the 5th Dynasty, carrying away two boxes suspended from

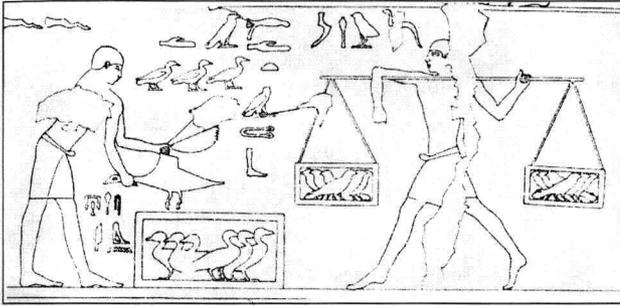


Fig. 4: Different motif of carrying away in Egyptian art: birds. Giza necropolis, tomb of Shepseskaefankh (after JUNKER 1938: p. 72, Abb. 8a).

A scene of a man carrying hedgehogs and a hare is known in the daily life scenes of private Theban tombs (WILKINSON AND HILL 1983: 70, n. 33.8.15) and is repeated in those of Ptah-hotep's tomb.

A proportion and schematic scene from the chapel at Meir (B2) of the 12th Dynasty is known. A man is shown carrying two baskets containing animals on an original grid (ROBINS 1994: 203, fig. 9.2; BLACKMAN 1915: pl. XI).

In a naval scene of a sailing boat, from the mastaba of Ka-en-nesu, two people appear to be carrying a coil of rope hanging from a wooden stick resting on their shoulders (JUNKER 1934: s. 156, Abb. 22). Moreover, from the tribute scene related to Punt in the Theban tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), two people are depicted carrying a long and heavy tree, probably an incense tree, suspended from a yoke (VANDIER 1964: 590, fig. 321, V).

Among the different motifs of the daily life scenes in the tomb of Ipy, TT 217, which include agricultural scenes, the manufacture of linen, harpooning fish, fowling birds, and unloading products from a boat towards a magazine, is a scene of a man accompanied by his dog, carrying his belongings in two large sacks suspended from a yoke over his shoulder (VANDIER 1964: 769, fig. 428 XX; SMITH 1983: 377-78, fig. 371).

In a daily life scene of the private tomb of Mahu, Chief of Police, from the necropolis of el-Amarna, a man is shown carrying two boxes hanging from a yoke; he is in the process of presenting produce to be put aside as provisions. In the same register a man is shown carrying a large fish on his shoulder, a motif that is repeated in other daily life scenes in private tombs (VANDIER 1964: 707, fig. 393). Fish carriers are shown in the daily life scenes of Adu's tomb, Denderah (Fig. 5; PETRIE 1900: pl. V); in the tomb of Anta, Deshasheh (PETRIE 1898: pl. VI); and in the tomb of Nefer-hotep (VANDIER 1964: 777, fig. 429, XXI).

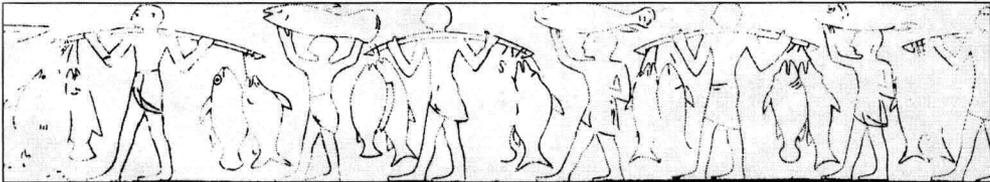


Fig. 5: Fish-carrier in the tomb of Adu, Dendera (after PETRIE 1900: pl. V).

Finally, a comic scene probably imitating in some way those abovementioned scenes is known from the tomb of Ny-ankh-pepy in the necropolis of Zawet el-Maiten. A monkey is shown carrying two large baskets suspended from a stick that rests on his shoulder (SHOUKRI n.d.: 143, fig. 71).

Water Carriers in Dilmun Glyptic Art

Recent archaeological activities at various sites on the western side of the Arabian/Persian Gulf have yielded various forms of evidence for the characteristic local culture known as the Dilmun culture, which reached its peak in the first half of the second millennium BCE. It had its different period of cultural contacts with the two major ancient cultural centers of Mesopotamia and the Indus region. Among its famous artifacts are collections of so-called Dilmun-type seals, which have a rounded shape and different scenes illustrating a variety of subjects.²

The image of a man bearing on his shoulder a pole supporting two large pots (jars), in connection with two rosette stars, appears on a few Dilmun-type seals from Ur, Maziad, UAE, and at Sar, Bahrain. It has a possible resemblance to those Syrian seals in connection with Aquarius. That design is most evocative of a water carrier; perhaps it is Akki, the drawer of water, commemorated in the legend of Sargon's birth, who is here depicted (RICE 1984: 209). E. Porada pointed out the presence of water carriers in Egyptian glyptic art, especially the image of Aquarius in the Zodiac scene, in which a man is shown carrying a pole supporting two bowls in a similar way to what we know from Dilmun-type seals (AL-THANY 1997: 160).

A few Dilmun-type seals, from archaeological sites on Failaka Island (Kuwait) and Bahrain, have this motif of a water carrier. The basic scene shows two people (probably offering bearers) on their way towards a temple, carrying on their shoulders a large vessel suspended from a pole (EL-SENDY 1994: 55). An image of the sun, probably representing the god to whom the gift is being presented, is shown at the top of the scene. It is possible that the vessel is filled with water in connection with the god of water, Inki, whose worship is dominant at sites in both Arabia and Mesopotamia.

There are two more examples of water carriers that occur among Dilmun-type seals. The first is a scene on a steatite seal, from the site of Sar, Bahrain (no. 4050), which has an image of two people: the first one, to the right, is naked while the other one wears a long garment that reaches below the knee; both move towards the left, bearing a pole from the mid position and from which hangs a large jar. At the top of the scene is an image of the sun with seven heads and a crescent on the top. At the bottom of the image is an animal facing in the opposite direction. Finally, a triangle is carved under the right hand of the second person (EL-SENDY 1994: 56).

A second steatite seal in the collection of the National Museum of Bahrain, from the same site of Sar (reg. # 2721), has an image of one person who, contrary to the previous seal, wears a long garment tightened at his waist and reaching his knee. He moves towards the right and carries on his shoulder a pole from which hangs vessels at both ends. He touches both vessels with his hands. The image of the sun is shown underneath the right vessel (Fig. 6; EL-SENDY 1994: 57).

Water Carriers in Mesopotamian Art

On a cylindrical seal from Mesopotamia, two people appear to be carrying a large jar hanging by a rope attached to a pole resting on their shoulders. They proceed to the right towards a seated figure, probably a ruler or god. A palm leaf appears over the pole while another person follows, carrying a stick over his left shoulder. Two small jars swing from its furthest end (Fig. 7; KARG 1984: taf. 11.6).



Fig. 6: Carrying water in Dilmun glyptic art (after EL SENDI 1994: 57, no. 2721).

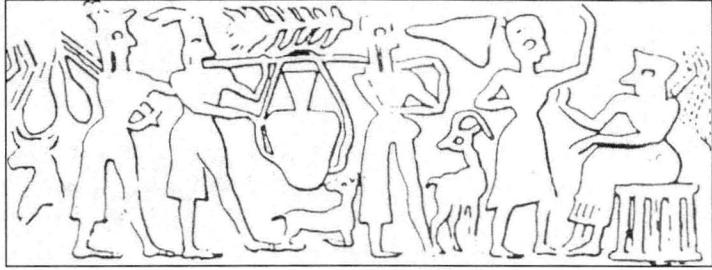


Fig. 7: Water-carrier in Mesopotamian art (after KARG 1984: Taf. 11: 6).

Moreover, on a stela from the city of Khafaga, in Mesopotamia (now in the Baghdad Museum), there is a scene depicting a celebration for the building of a temple, from the first half of the third millennium BCE. Two people are shown carrying a large jar suspended from a yoke resting on their shoulders (MORTKART 1975: 89, pl. 43).

Conclusion

Looking back to those scenes that illustrate water carriers, or their variations, in both Egyptian and Near Eastern regions, one could conclude the following points:

- The dominant type of water carrier in Egyptian art is depicted in the form of a man holding a stick or a pole to which a large pot (jar) is attached by a rope. A person may also be shown putting a jar on his shoulder or lifting it up. It is probable that these vessels were filled with water or with beer/oil for either a process of provision or as a presentation to the tomb owner (table 1).
- The second dominant type is the image of two people carrying a yoke with a large (heavy) jar, usually surrounded by a net or a rope. It is probable that the jar was filled with wine/beer rather than with water and was intended to be put aside as part of provisioning.
- A similar scene of carrying jars filled with water and suspended from a yoke is known in Egyptian daily life scenes but with different motifs: carrying fowls, animals and fish in boxes or baskets.
- Those vessels filled with water in Dilmun glyptic art are probably connected to Inzak/Inki, the water god in the mythology of Dilmun.
- Finally, the type of pottery depicted is not of a unified type but is related to its function and to whom it is connected.

Appendix

Table 1: Types of Scenes in Egyptian Art

1—One person carrying jars filled with water or the like

Seq.	Description	Source
1-	A man carrying two jars suspended from a yoke	Tomb of Mereruka Tomb of Niankhamen and Khnumhotep, Saqqara Tomb of Meketre Transportation of Djehuty-hotep's statue Theban tomb of Antefeker Meketre models
2-	A man pouring water, while others lift jars suspended from a yoke	Transportation of Djehuty-hotep
3-	Lifting up water from a pool	Tomb of Djehuty-nefer, Thebes Tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100
4-	Shepherd carrying jars from a stick hanging on his shoulder	Tomb at Saqqara

2—A man helps his master in drinking water

Seq.	Description	Source
1-	Servant lifts up jar filled with water towards the lips of his master	Tomb of artist Niankptah, Saqqara
2-	Servant presents water for his master	Tomb of Mery I, Hagarseh

3—Two persons carry a heavy large jar suspended from a yoke

Seq.	Description	Source
1-	Two persons transporting large jar suspended from a yoke	Tomb of Rekhmire TT 100 Tomb of Djhutynefer, Thebes TT 343 Theban Tomb of Khaemwase Theban tomb of Huy, TT 40 Tomb of Puyemre

4—One person carrying different materials suspended from a yoke

Seq.	Description	Source
1-	A person holds from a stick a basket on one end and a jar on the other end	Stela of Sobek, BM 1372
2-	A man pulling water out by a shaduf	Tomb of Ipy, TT 217
3-	A monkey carries two baskets suspended from a yoke	Stela in Berlin museum
4-	A person carries baskets filled with animals, birds	Shepses-ka-ef-anekh's tomb
		Seshemfefer II-III Ptah-hotep's tomb
5-	A man carries two sacks from a yoke	Tomb of Ipy TT 217
6-	A man carries fish in his two hands or fish from a yoke	Tomb of Idu, Amarna
		Tomb of Mahu, Amarna

5—Two persons carrying different materials: fish suspended from a lance , ropes, or trees

Seq.	Description	Source
1-	Two persons carrying fish hanging from a lance	Tomb of Anta, Desheshah
2-	Two persons carrying circle of ropes related to a boat	Tomb at Giza Necropolis
3-	Two persons carry away a heavy incense tree, suspended from a yoke	Tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100

Table 2: Scene Types in Dilmun and Mesopotamian Art

6—Similar scenes of carrying jars suspended from a yoke filled most probably with water from Dilmun seals and in Mesopotamian art

Seq.	Description	Source
1-	A man carries two jars suspended from a yoke	Dilmun seal, Bahrain
2-	Two persons carry a heavy jar suspended from a yoke	Dilmun seal, Bahrain
3-	Two persons carry a heavy jar suspended from a yoke	Cylindrical seal, Mesopotamia
		Stela in Baghdad museum

Notes:

- 1 It is a great opportunity to take part in that special celebration dedicated to Professor Dr. David O'Connor whom I met and from whom I received the benefit of his knowledge while on my special fellowship for a Ph.D. in Egyptology from the University of Pennsylvania, back in 1983. He was and still is one of the greatest scholars in the field of Egyptology. I first shared this dedicated paper with him at the American Research Center in Egypt 57th annual meeting, April 2006.
- 2 For more discussion on the culture of Dilmun, see SHAHEEN 1997.

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