

THE IRON AGE *PITHOI* DRAWINGS FROM HORVAT TEMAN OR KUNTILLET 'AJRUD: SOME NEW PROPOSALS¹

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Abstract

Did the Israelites and Judahites of the Iron age visually represent their gods? In this article, established arguments are supplemented and some new ones advanced in support of a single, ancient composer's representation of the deities Yahweh and Asherah by means of the deliberate association of text and image on the two pithoi scenes from Iron age Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Not only were the ancient artist and scribe one and the same, but this individual employed a number of well known artistic techniques to convey both depth of field and perspective in such a way as to create a unified field of meaning for each of the two ritual scenes as well as for both scenes in their complementary function as two halves of a larger semiotic whole.

"We know, in fact that images thrive in a lasting manner only when they work together, one nourishing the other..."

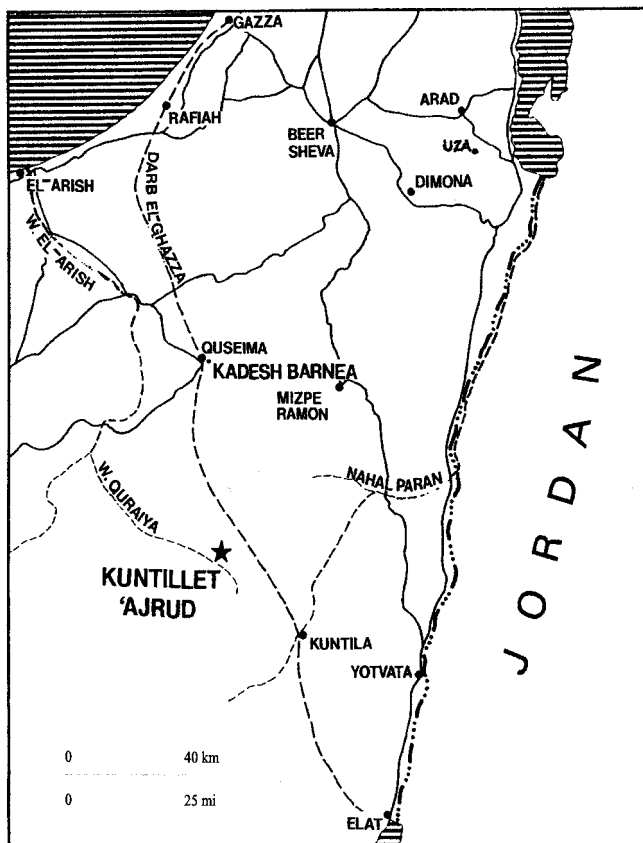
Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*

Introduction

The discoveries at Horvat Teman or Kuntillet 'Ajrud are finally getting the credit they deserve, that is, if the space devoted to these Iron age finds in recent syntheses of ancient Israelite religions is any

¹ This article is an expansion on, as well as an update of, aspects of my article published in 1995:75-106. There I engaged earlier scholarship pertaining to these two pithoi drawings. Various parts of the present treatment were offered in preliminary form at the 2000 Rencontre assyriologique internationale in Paris, the 2001 Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting in Denver, and the 2002 Society of Biblical Literature international meeting in Berlin. The attached exhibits A-D, I and J are adapted from Meshel 1978, 1993; exhibits E-H from Van Lepp 1993, and exhibit K from Pardee 1998.

Exhibit A

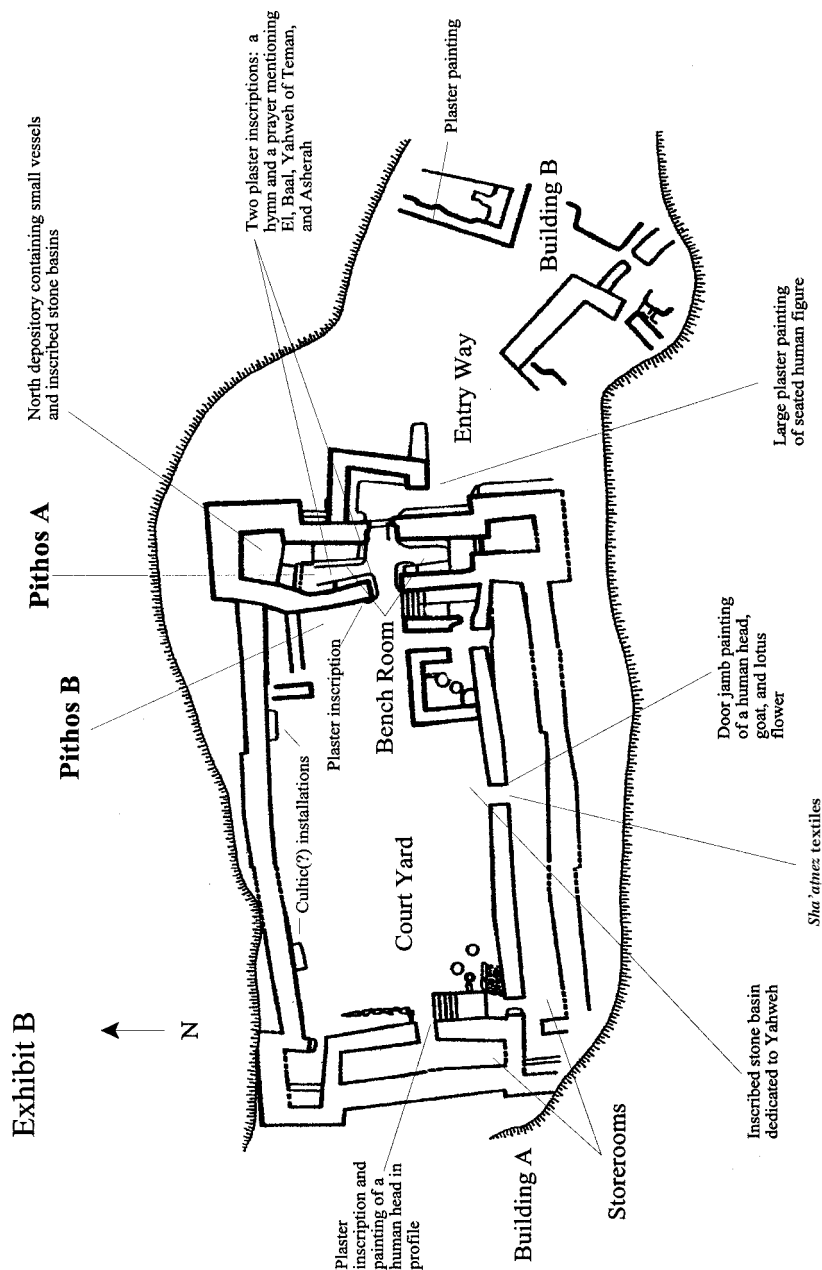


KUNTILLET 'AJRUD - HORVAT TEMAN

measure of their importance.² While these finds have made quite a stir over the past twenty-five years since their discovery,³ the view

² Cf. e.g., Miller 2000:29-40 and Zevit 2001:370-405.

³ As suggested by the number of monographs, book chapters, articles in technical journals and in popular magazines devoted to these finds. I have identified fourteen books, unpublished dissertations and monographs, some based on dissertations, dedicated to the study of the goddess Asherah that include extended treatment of the relevant evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud: Engle 1980, Maier 1986,



from within the 'guild' throughout the 70s, 80s and the early 90s was rather mixed. Seen retrospectively, such a reaction finds at least partial vindication as it has served to advance the collective analysis of these finds via extensive debate, reflection, and dialogue. As for the present state of the art, there appears to be a growing consensus that these finds have helped to transform the modern study of ancient Israelite religions in two distinct, but interrelated, areas: the recognition that *feminization* significantly impacted early Israel's concepts of the divine and the acknowledgement that *sympiosis* characterized the earliest Israelite henotheistic-monotheistic tendencies. Opinion is clearly more divided on the matter of Horvat Teman's potential contribution to another area of Israelite religions namely, the iconic portrayal of the gods, and it is Kuntillet 'Ajrud's contribution to the concrete *visualization* of the divine that constitutes the focus of the present article.

Two artifacts have peaked the interest of interpreters in this regard; the two large storage jars with drawings and inscriptions preserved on their reconstructed surfaces. These jars, commonly referred to in the literature as pithos A and pithos B, were recovered from the Iron age context within the larger of the two buildings on the site, building A or the western building (cf. exhibits A and B). Some of the inscriptions on pithos A and pithos B refer to what many identify as two Israelite or Judahite deities, Yahweh and Asherah. The accompanying drawings portray in one of the two scenes preserved on pithos A, two composite figures made up of animal and human body parts (cf. exhibit C) and in another instance—the lone surviving scene on pithos B—a string of six human worshipers (cf. exhibit D). A host of wild and domesticated animals dot the landscapes of both drawings or scenes, some only partially preserved.

A close examination of exhibits C and D illustrates some of the major points of interest to and of discussion among interpreters. The two rather exotic figures at the center of the scene on pithos A are located in close proximity to an inscription immediately above the figure on the (observer's) left. Positioned at the top of exhibit C is a English translation of the inscription for the reader's convenience. Exhibit C clearly demonstrates that that inscription above these two

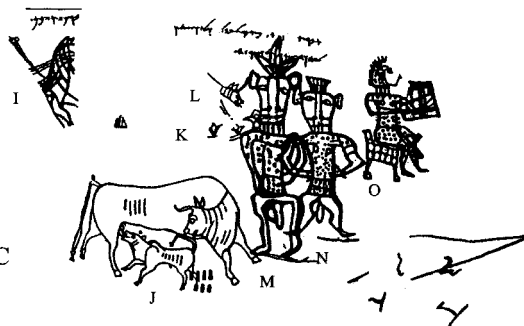
Olyan 1988, Petley 1990, Smith 1990, Dietrich and Loretz, 1992, Wiggins 1993, Frevel, 1995, Keel 1998, Merlo 1998, Binger 1999, Hadley 2000, Day 2000, Zevit 2001.

Overlapping Inscription

Pithos A Scene

"This says PN1... 'Say to Yehal[...] and to Yoasah and to [PN2...
I have blessed before Yahweh of Shomron and his Asherah'."

Exhibit C

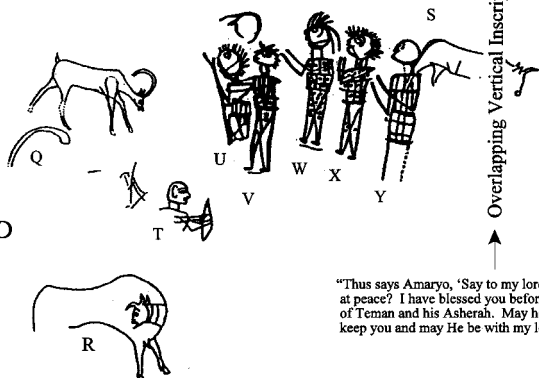


Inscription

Pithos B Scene

[...] before Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah [...] whatever he
shall ask of anyone, may He grant it [...] and may Yahweh give
him according to his heart."

Exhibit D



"Thus says Amaryo, 'Say to my lord 'Are you
at peace? I have blessed you before Yahweh
of Teman and his Asherah. May he bless and
keep you and may He be with my lord [...]'"

figures overlaps with the headdress of the larger of the two. Although the significance of this overlap is debated, its occurrence is not.

The scenes in exhibits C and D elicit a number of questions that have intrigued interpreters for the past quarter of a century. First, who are the three figures in the center of the scene and to the (observer's) right of center on pithos A? Second, what is the significance of the textual reference to Asherah or asherah in the inscription above, and overlapping, one the two figures at the center of the pithos A scene? Is it a reference to the goddess or to someone or something else? Third, what relationship, if any, do these figures

share with the overlapping inscription? Included here is a fourth, pivotal question, one often neglected in treatments of the pithos A and pithos B drawings and inscriptions. What relationship, if any, exists between the scene and inscription on pithos A (exhibit C) and the scene and inscriptions preserved on pithos B (cf. exhibit D)?⁴

While an increasing number of interpreters have come to recognize that these two jar inscriptions from Horvat Teman verify the existence and active role of a goddess in Iron age Israel and/or Judah, the relation, if any, of the inscriptions to the overlapping and adjoining pithoi drawings remains an ongoing point of inquiry. A small minority of interpreters have viewed the pithoi drawings as intimately related to the accompanying inscriptions. For every scholar who advocates this interpretation, however, there are at least five who do not. In the event that one might be tempted to relegate this specific matter to the level of a minor intra-disciplinary “quibble”, one need only consider the implications that an integrated scene containing both image and text of Yahweh and the goddess Asherah at Iron age Kuntillet ‘Ajrud would present for the history and character of Israelite iconic and aniconic cults. In the hope of bolstering one position or another, attention on both sides has tended to focus on three factors: the function and character of the site and its buildings, isolated philological details in the inscriptions, and the various art historical aspects of the drawings. For the historian of religion the stakes are indeed high.

As for the site’s function and character, the excavator, Ze’ev Meshel, concluded that Horvat Teman was a religious center, but others have countered with alternative views. The site was a military fortress or a caravanserai, a desert way station, not a religious shrine. The non-religious reconstructions of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud have served from time to time to weaken arguments for the religious function and importance of individual artifacts recovered at the site. In the event that an isolated datum was recognized as possessing some religious use or symbolism, the tendency to over-secularize the site occasionally infused the debate with dichotomous and often mutually exclusive categories such as “official vs. popular” or “for-

⁴ The author would be remiss if he neglected to mention another question of crucial relevance to the interpretation of the pithos A figures, “what *is that* dangling between their legs?” Two options attested in the art historical repertoire of Bes-like figures have been proposed: phalluses and/or tails. For examples, cf. Romano 1980:52-53 (figs. 4, 6). An Iron II Bes amulet of unknown provenance housed in the Rockefeller museum portrays Bes with both phallus and tail, cf. Herrmann 1994:358 (catalog #405) and photographic plate #27.

eign vs. indigenous". As a result, religion at Horvat Teman has been often relegated to the status of heterodoxy; foreign in origin and popular in conception.

The crux of the philological argument is the significance of the final **-h** on the Hebrew term designating Asherah or asherah (**šrth**) in the pithoi inscriptions. According to several authors, the use of the Hebrew (3ms) suffixed possessive pronoun **-h** or "his" in the phrase, "...Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah⁵" or "...his asherah" (**yhwš šmrn wšrth**), renders the construction "his Asherah" or "his asherah" an unlikely reference to the goddess, since the use of such pronouns with personal or divine names is unprecedented in biblical and epigraphic Hebrew. For some, the inscription more likely constitutes a later practice text (following the jar's destruction or misplacement) and the reference to Hebrew asherah here probably refers to a cult object—either a pole or tree—rather than the deity by that name.⁶

The essence of the art historical interpretation of the pithoi drawings is the identity of the two central figures and the lyre player in one of the two scenes preserved on pithos A (cf. exhibit C).⁷ Numerous options have been proposed; for the most part deities previously known, but identified here in various combinations and correspondences with the three figures drawn on the pithos A jar. Those who disassociate image and text on pithos A assert that the central drawing on pithos A (exhibit C) preserves two representations of the god Bes known primarily from Egyptian sources but that the overlapping inscription is unrelated since Yahweh and Asherah would not be imaged as the god Bes, or the couple, Bes and Beset.⁸ In their rejection of any connection between image and text in the pithoi scenes, many invoke Pirhiya Beck's suggestion that the pithoi drawings and inscriptions were not composed by the same hand and that the drawings evince an unsophisticated level of artistic dabbling.

In what follows, established lines of argument and evidence are

⁵ This is a translated excerpt from the Hebrew inscription that overlaps one of the two central figures to the (observer's) left on the central scene from pithos A (cf. exhibit C).

⁶ The interpretation of asherah as a "shrine" remains an alternative for some interpreters and eliminates any explicit association with the deity Asherah.

⁷ For a black and white partial photograph of the scene, cf. Meshel 1978:pl.12.

⁸ For the record, Keel and Uehlinger 1998:219 offer a variation on the Bes, or more popularly, Bes and Beset, interpretation in their proposal that the two figures are not a heterosexual pair, but are two Bes variants, "one masculine and one bisexual-feminized".

supplemented and some new ones are advanced in support of a single, ancient composer's deliberate association of text and image on pithos A and pithos B. Not only were the ancient artist and the ancient scribe one and the same, but this individual employed a number of well known artistic techniques to convey both depth of field and perspective in such a way as to create a unified field of meaning for each of the two pithoi scenes individually as well as for both scenes when viewed as two complementary halves of a larger semiotic whole. This unified field of meaning, minimally speaking, was designed to portray the deities Yahweh and Asherah in their respective composite forms (or *Mischwesen*) as beings of supra human power. As such, the presence of these deities insured the conveyance of the blessings contained in the inscriptions that overlap or adjoin their visual representations. The wider contextual environments in which the drawings and inscriptions were generated and then situated in antiquity—the archaeological, philological, and art historical—lend credence to this interpretation.

The Archaeological Context: The Religious Use of the Site

In this section, what can be presently known about Kuntillet 'Ajrud's material culture will be surveyed with a view to identifying, if not the design or function of the site in its entirety, then at least, the immediate context of the pithoi scenes. It was on the basis of these finds that Meshel interpreted Iron age Horvat Teman as a religious center adjacent to a major trade route. As noted previously, others have concluded that Kuntillet 'Ajrud served as a fortress or a way station in the desert.⁹ By their very nature, such 'secularizing' interpretations reconfigure the nature of ancient religious life at Horvat Teman. They also potentially contribute to the characterization of the site's individual religious artifacts as popular in orientation or of foreign origin. Frequently neglected or downplayed in these tendencies, however, is the variety of epigraphic and anepigraphic finds of

⁹ Cf. the arguments against the religious cult center or shrine interpretation set forth most recently in Hadley, 2000:106-20. On p.109, Hadley offers her definition of a shrine: "A 'shrine' usually implies the local residence of the deity with even perhaps his or her image or symbol, possibly set up in a separate structure (cf. 1 Kings viii)". On p.108, she adds some elements, a "local shrine, inhabited by local priests, and even perhaps a pilgrimage site of its own ..." and on p.110 she concludes "that the building at Kuntillet 'Ajrud was not necessarily built as a religious structure".

a religious character recovered from the larger of the site's two buildings, building A. This building is situated on the western edge of Kuntillet 'Ajrud. As illustrated in exhibit B, fragments of both jars were found in this same building. Shards of pithos A were recovered from the debris in the bench room of building A. Pithos B was reconstructed from shards found in the northeast corner of building A's inner courtyard, to the immediate west of, and on the other side of a wall from, the bench room containing pithos A (exhibit B).

Building A's Architectural Features

What has developed is an unfortunate case of two ships passing in the night. Several of building A's architectural features indeed suggest its fortress-like design and perhaps a corresponding military function: its large rectangular shape, its double walls, the corner towers and its open central court yard. These, building A shares with known Iron age fortresses in the Negev such as those found at Kadesh-Barnea, Arad, and Horvat 'Uza. This observation alone, however, does not exclude the possibility of a religious function of the site. Moreover, the lack of casemate walls and gates typical of fortress construction, and the presence of several architectural features and artifacts pointing to a religious use of building A do not categorically eliminate the likelihood of a military function for the site.¹⁰ These seeming architectural anomalies may hint at some function of the site that is distinct or unique to Kuntillet 'Ajrud, and one presently unknown to us, that included both religious and military-economic aspects, but more on this to come. For present purposes, only the former is of immediate concern.

Particularly suggestive of the religious design of its architectural features is building A's unique entry way with its superior white-washed plaster promenade leading into a passageway flanked by two plastered side rooms with low elevation benches for the placement of offerings (cf. exhibit B). Furthermore, at the northern and southern extremities of this bench room area are chambers that possibly functioned as *favissae* or depositories for discarded votive offerings like those attested in many Bronze to Iron age sanctuaries. When these are viewed alongside the numerous drawings and inscriptions mentioning deities like Baal, El, Yahweh (and Asherah) that were

¹⁰ Often cited in favor of one or the other position is the *absence* of concrete data supporting the opposing position, e.g. no altars (negating the religious center interpretation) or no casemate walls (negating the fortress interpretation).

originally displayed on the plastered walls of building A and at widely separated locales within the building's confines (on the bench room's west wall and on the westernmost wall of the inner courtyard, cf. exhibit B), building A's use for sacred ritual is difficult, if not impossible, to discount. A closer examination of these finds from the bench room further illustrates this point.

Artifacts from the Entry Way and the Bench Room

One ink inscription written on plaster was found in situ, on the northern door jamb between the bench room and the inner courtyard as noted in exhibit B. It mentions the gods El and Baal within the context of a hymnic theophany. Another similar inscription was recovered near the west wall of the bench room from which it had fallen (exhibit B). This ink on plaster inscription preserves the names of Yahweh and Asherah within the context of a benediction.¹¹

A wall painting of a seated figure found in the entry way to building A is also relevant here. This artifact often goes unmentioned or is cited only in passing, although Pirhiya Beck, in her lengthy analysis of Horvat Teman's finds, described this wall painting on plaster in some detail. The surviving fragments preserve the profile of a human head facing right with an eye and ear(?) all drawn in red outline, the eyeball and hair rendered in black, and a red object with black markings which Beck identified as a lotus blossom, concealing the mouth of the human figure. Additional plaster fragments show the figure dressed in a yellow garment with a red neckline border and a double collar-band drawn in red and encasing rows of black dots. Also discernable is a chair with a garment depicted in elaborate arrays of color (yellow, black, and red), part of the chair's frame, pomegranates, and an unidentifiable plant. Beck pointed out that the size of the scene is impressive measuring some 32 cm in height, by far the largest mural at the site. She also speculated that these fragments are remnants of a larger scene that may have included several human figures participating in some type of ceremony with various plants in the background.¹²

¹¹ Meshel 1993:1462.

¹² Beck 1982:52-56 and esp. the illustrated reconstruction on p.54 and cf. Beck 2000:180-81 (fig.31). On the basis of her analysis of the wall paintings, Beck concluded that "the fact that the walls of Horvat Teiman were decorated with murals does not—per se—prove that the site had a religious function" (1982:61), but when considered in the light of the dedications, prayers or blessings inscribed on the pithoi and other objects, the names of the gods mentioned in them, and the

Mention should be made here of three large inscribed stone bowls that were found in the bench room. Two of the bowls have legible inscriptions on them that, in the light of a fourth inscribed votive bowl recovered from the south store room entry way to the court yard and preserving the divine name, Yahweh (see below), strongly suggest that these three were likewise votive bowls dedicated to the god(s).

Artifacts in The Court Yard and Its Store Rooms

In addition to pithos B which was found in the northeastern corner of the court yard near the adjoining wall of the bench room and the bench room's north door jamb inscription adjacent to the court yard, there are several other artifacts from the inner court yard that point to its religious use. Of the four votive stone bowls found at the site, the largest was recovered from near the entry way to the south store room of the court yard (cf. exhibit B). That it was designed as a votive to a deity who was served in the court yard area by a donor seeking divine blessing is illustrated by the inscription on its shoulder "belonging to Obadyo, son of Adnah, may he be blessed by Yahw[eh]".¹³

A scene consisting of a human head, a large lotus flower, a goat, and three other figures, two animals and one human, was painted directly on the unplastered surface of the door jamb of the same south store room entry way. Beck had concluded that the various elements on this door jamb drawing were not related owing to their differing sizes, ground lines and overlapping.¹⁴ As the following analysis will seek to demonstrate, overlapping and variation in size and ground line were common techniques employed by ancient artists to convey depth of field and perspective and the drawings from Kuntillet 'Ajrud were no exception. The drawing at hand may have conveyed a unified scene owing to its proximity to the large stone votive bowl. Given the symbolic significance of animals and lotus

benches on which the dedicated offerings were deposited, she had drawn the more telling conclusion in the previous paragraph on the same page that "there are numerous hints that the buildings might have had a religious function".

¹³ Meshel 1978 (para. C) lists its weight as 200 kg. For a black and white photo, cf. Meshel 1978:pl.10 and 1993:1461. Zevit 2001:380 n.58 questions Meshel's speculation that the bowl had been dragged from the bench room to its location in the south store room entry way and argues for the religious function of the court yard based in part on the bowl's location there.

¹⁴ Beck 1982:59.

flowers in other drawings and paintings at the site, it probably possessed religious symbolism. The same applies to the painted fragments found at the entrance to the west store room of the courtyard. There an inscription preserving two letters along with other plaster fragments with writing on them were found. The fragment containing the inscription was composed in conjunction with the drawing of a human head in profile.¹⁵

Two installations located along the northern wall of building A's courtyard can be interpreted as additional evidence for the observance of sacred ritual within the courtyard's confines (cf. exhibit B).¹⁶ Zevit has speculated that, based on various elements of duality attested at other cult sites such as Qasile and Lachish, these two installations along with the two cooking areas located in the southeast and southwest corners of the courtyard, attest to the worship of two distinct deities at the site.¹⁷ While such a proposal is at present impossible to assess, in the light of other evidence surveyed here supporting a religious use of the site, these installations reflect some type of cultic function.

Some one hundred textile fragments, mostly linen, a few woollen pieces, were found in three locations on the site: just outside the western wall of the courtyard near an oven, in the courtyard itself, and the largest pieces were found in the courtyard's south store room. When viewed in the light of other lines of evidence in favor of the religious use of the site by pilgrims, travelers and locals, the handful of textile pieces of mixed linen and wool composition (Hebrew *ša'tanēz*, cf. Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9-11), have suggested to interpreters that special priestly garments were worn at the site. In the Hebrew Bible, mixed textiles of linen and wool were reserved for the high priest (Exod. 28:6,8,15; 39:2,5, 8, 29). The recovery of loom weights may point to their local production.¹⁸

While it is unlikely that the site as a whole was constructed and designed in its entirety as a temple or shrine, numerous artifacts

¹⁵ Beck 1982:58-59 compares this inscription that arches around the human head to dedication inscriptions surrounding desert rock drawings.

¹⁶ For the identification of these installations, cf. Ayalon 1995:143,189. They are not identified in many of Meshel's publications. While they do appear in the site plan of his entry in *NEAEHL*, cf. Meshel 1993:458 where they are not labeled or identified by title or number, but only illustrated. In his earlier site plans published in 1978 and 1992:104, they are entirely absent.

¹⁷ Zevit 2001:379.

¹⁸ Cf. Sheffer in Meshel 1978 ("The Textiles"), Meshel 1992:106, and Zevit 2001:376.

recovered from Horvat Teman point to the extensive religious use of the site's architectural space and artistic design. Therefore, if it can be assumed that some version of the caravanserais or fortress interpretations should remain a viable component in interpreting the overall function of the site, then Kuntillet 'Ajrud might have served as a rest stop and a fortified trade center situated on a major commercial route, but as indicated by the complementary (but not mutually exclusive!) elements of design and functionality, the site also provided for the observance of religious ritual.

A brief review of what we know of a somewhat similar data set from another contemporary Iron age site, Tell Deir 'Alla in the eastern Jordan valley, might provide some confirmation of the complexities involved. As at Horvat Teman, there is unequivocal evidence for the religious function of at least part of Deir 'Alla, namely the room wherein the now famous Balaam text was constructed as a large ink-on-plaster wall inscription. Like the wall inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, the Balaam text from Deir 'Alla was displayed in a room that contained benches, and in this case, with benches on two sides. According to the excavators, one of the benches, the south bench, might have been designed to receive offerings.¹⁹ Of particular relevance to the present study is the attestation of drawings in close proximity to inscriptions. For example, a drawing of a sphinx is located immediately adjacent to the upper left corner of the Balaam text.²⁰

The contents recovered from several other rooms at Deir 'Alla point to storage and cooking facilities; large jars, jugs, craters, ovens and cooking pots, all indicative of household activities while the pottery repertoire and the abundance of loom weights suggest the local production of fabrics. When considered collectively, these data led the excavators to conclude that while a typical cultic center was not attested at the site, another kind of religious center, one not yet archaeologically known, had to be considered.²¹ In fact, Franken the director of excavations, posited that Deir 'Alla comprises a sanctuary connected to trade or a "trade sanctuary".²² Broadly speaking, contemporary Iron age sites such as Horvat Teman and Deir 'Alla

¹⁹ Ibrahim and Van Der Kooij 1991:20-21.

²⁰ Cf. Van Der Kooij 1993:341. The ink-on-plaster wall drawing of the sphinx is well illustrated, and its position relative to the text discussed, in Van Der Kooij 1991:242-43.

²¹ Ibrahim and Van Der Kooij 1991:23.

²² Franken 1991:10-11.

may attest to the practice of building fortified living compounds along extended trading routes designed to facilitate travel through the region. Specific rooms or areas within those larger complexes were set aside and decorated with ink-on-plaster wall paintings and inscriptions conveying various religious themes to facilitate the cultic observances of both the locals who regularly passed near the site and travelers who temporarily lodged at or near the compound on their way through the region.

The Philological Context: The Pithoi A and B Inscriptions

Having highlighted some of the more salient religious aspects of the wider, yet immediate, archaeological and architectural contexts at Horvat Teman that informed ancient understandings of the function and significance of the site, its buildings, and ultimately their contents, the analysis will next attempt to assess an isolated, but pivotal, philological datum. This datum directly impacts the interpretation of the pithos A and pithos B inscriptions and thereby, secondarily explicates the relationship of the inscriptions to the overlapping or adjoining drawings.

The Grammatical Function of Asherah's Final -h

The construction **ʾšrth** appears in a handful of Horvat Teman inscriptions including those on pithos A and pithos B. The **-h** attached to the term **ʾšrt** has been taken by some to be the suffixed possessive pronoun producing translations such as, “his Asherah,”—a reference to the goddess—or, “his asherah,” a sacred object. As an alternative, the **-h** has also been viewed as evidence for secondary feminization. Zevit views the **-h** of **ʾšrth** as evidence of a new form of the divine name. It is not the pronominal suffix, but a *mater lectionis* indicating a final *ā* vowel functioning as a secondary feminization marker to the preceding **-t-**. For Zevit this approach avoids the problems he associates with the suffixed possessive pronoun interpretation of **-h** when attached to a proper noun, yet it upholds the mention of the goddess in the Kuntilet ‘Ajrud inscriptions.²³ All of the above options share a common outcome as far as the ancient composer and his/her ancient audience were concerned: the goddess Asherah was a reality and her efficacious powers were recognized at Kuntilet

²³ Zevit, 2001:363-66, 400-05.

‘Ajrud. This stands whether it is “Asherah” or “his Asherah” or “his asherah” (a sacred, hypothesized [?] pole or tree) that is in view. Zevit’s proposal is the least preferred, however, since his support for the use of a final **-h** to signify secondary feminization in epigraphic Hebrew of the 9th to 8th centuries BCE comes from debatable biblical examples none of which can be securely dated, and a single equivocal reference on a 7th century seal of unknown provenance.

So, the question stands: can the grammatical construction: divine name (DN) + suffixed **-h** allow for the explicit reference to the goddess here as some uphold? While no known instance of the use of the suffixed possessive pronoun attached to a personal or divine name is otherwise attested in biblical Hebrew or in epigraphic Hebrew, the use of a suffixed pronoun on divine names is attested in several other Semitic languages. Scholars going back to G. R. Driver have cited similar constructions in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Ethiopic and Arabic.²⁴ Eblaite can now be confidently added to the list of Semitic languages documenting the use of the suffixed pronoun on proper names as the example **a-dam-ma-su** “his Adammū,” clearly illustrates.²⁵

As for Ugaritic analogues, the construction **l’nth** “for his ‘Anatu” in CAT 1.43:13 is typically cited as the most reliable example. The intended antecedent is possibly preserved in the construction **‘nt gtr** “‘Anatu of Gatharu” in 1.108:6. Pardee, however, rejects this option since ‘Anatu remains otherwise unattested as Gatharu’s consort. He has proposed instead that the **-h** on **l’nth** functions in a directive sense as a doubly marked adverbial form in conjunction with the prefixed **l-** preposition indicating the recipient of sacrifices, “to ‘Anatu”.²⁶ This approach to **l’nth** seems rather convoluted based as it is on the *absence of evidence* for the pairing of ‘Anatu and Gatharu, its strained reinterpretation of the construction **‘nt gtr** “‘Anatu of Gatharu” in 1.108:6 as “‘Anatu-of-Might,” and its dismissal of the secure Akkadian and Eblaite evidence for the use of the suffixed possessive pronoun with proper names.

It is far less complicated to interpret **gtr** in the construction **‘nt gtr** as a divine name than it is to conjecture an adjectival form.²⁷ Analogous constructions do exist attesting to a divine pair as Elephantine **‘nt-yhw**, **‘nt-byt’l** and **šm-byt’l** indicate. Neither Par-

²⁴ Driver 1954:125-36.

²⁵ See now Xella 1995:599-610, esp. pp.605-07.

²⁶ Cf. Pardee 1993:309, 1995:301-03, 2000:216-19, 247-48, 2002:69-72, 101.

²⁷ Pardee 2002:195.

dee's proposed title for 'Anatu with adjectival **gtr** nor similar titles for 'Anatu are otherwise attested in Ugaritic. This he readily acknowledges.²⁸

In any case, the central text in question, CAT 1.43, documents the close proximity of these two gods, 'Anatu and Gatharu. In lines 11b-13, the two appear in consecutive order in the sacrificial rite, first Gatharu, then 'Anatu. In lines 17-18 and 19-20, **gtrm** and '**ntm** appear as repeated parallel members. If the **-m** on '**ntm** in lines 18 and 20 is adverbial as suggested by Pardee, "for 'Anatu also",²⁹ then this tips the balance in favor of interpreting the **-m** on the parallel **gtrm** of lines 17 and 19 in the same manner, "... for Gatharu also, ... for 'Anatu also." These considerations support the possible pairing of these two deities and eliminates the need to suggest an otherwise unattested construction involving the adjectival function for **gtr** in '**nt gtr** of 1.108:6.

Returning to the Hebrew evidence for a suffixed possessive pronoun, one must make an important distinction between biblical Hebrew and epigraphic Hebrew on this particular point. On the one hand, the Hebrew Bible comprises a limited corpus of literature containing henotheistic-monotheistic references to Yahweh and, for the most part, only disparaging references to other deities. Should we even expect then to find a grammatical construction in biblical Hebrew in which one god is referenced as the possession of (or paired with) another? Epigraphic Hebrew, on the other hand, is an ever expanding corpus. It can readily accommodate the pairing of various deities, that is if the inscriptions from Horvat Teman and Khirbet el-Qôm preserving the names of deities like El, Baal (and Asherah) as well as Yahweh are any indication of its potential in this regard. Given the corroborative evidence for such a construction in several related Semitic languages, it is not much of a stretch to propose that a divine name in Iron age epigraphic Hebrew might be found with a suffixed pronoun indicating the pairing of that deity with another. In fact, according to one recent grammar of epigraphic Hebrew, Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom preserve the earliest attestations of a personal name bound by a pronominal suffix. Gogel lists the pithos A and pithos B texts from Kuntillet 'Ajrud as well as the **šrth** of Khirbet el-Qom 3:5 as just such references.³⁰ In sum, the construction DN + suffix, "his (=Yahweh's)

²⁸ Pardee 2002:205 n.9.

²⁹ Most recently in Pardee 2002:108 n.95.

³⁰ Gogel 1998:156 and cf. pp.412-14. As noted by many others, proper names

Asherah” or *šrt+h* requires far less convoluted arguments than any alternative interpretations offered to date. But in what sense can one deity be the possession of the other or to quote Zevit; “What would it have meant to say that the goddess belonged to or was possessed by Yahweh?”³¹

The Semantic Significance of the Final -h

A number of interpreters have noted the use of the pronominal suffix in the Semitic languages to express the endearment or relationship that bonded a worshiper to his or her god, e.g., “my Nabu,” and not merely some literal or restricted notion of possession or ownership.³² Can a similar expression of endearment shared by divine couples be categorically eliminated from the possible range of meanings conveyed by the suffixed pronoun *-h* attached to *šrt* at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud? The archeological and philological evidence supports the view that the pithos A and pithos B inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud testify to the worship Yahweh and the one whom Yahweh greatly endeared; “his Asherah.”³³

The Art Historical Context: Artistic Technique and the Pithoi Drawings

After twenty years and a plethora of publications, Beck’s analysis still stands as the starting point for all subsequent research on the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud drawings and fortunately for later students of these finds, she completed an exhaustive treatment of the drawings on the two large storage jars that comprise the focus of this article. Beck invoked extensive parallels and influences from Egypt and north Syria in her analysis of the pithos A and pithos B drawings.³⁴

Both the cross-cultural use of so-called Bes imagery or, more accurately, Egyptian dwarf-god imagery, by ancient artisans to represent a variety of deities and that imagery’s assimilation of characteristics from west Asiatic and Mesopotamian gods are well

including the divine name Yahweh do appear in bound relation or in construct state to other nouns such as geographical names in biblical Hebrew and in epigraphic Hebrew, cf. e.g., Kuntillet ‘Ajrud’s “Yahweh of Samaria” or “Yahweh of Teman”.

³¹ Zevit 2001:403 n.110.

³² Xella 1995:601-02 and Smith 2001:73.

³³ Cf. similarly Merlo 1998:195-97.

³⁴ Beck 1982:3-68. For additional evidence for Egyptian artistic influence on the pithos A and pithos B drawings, cf. now Barkay and Im 2001:288-300.

documented.³⁵ The composite character of the Bes-like figures at Kuntillet 'Ajrud and the monster origins of Bes were particularly appropriate for depicting local manifestations of deities like Yahweh and Asherah that might themselves have had more ancient, monstrous origins.³⁶ The two Kuntillet 'Ajrud figures on pithos A not only convey characteristics similar to those associated with such Egyptian dwarf-god imagery, they also share some elements in common with the Phoenician horned demon tradition.³⁷ If the two figures on pithos A could conceivably represent Yahweh and Asherah in a combination of elements originating in Egyptian dwarf-god imagery and in Phoenician horned demon imagery, whatever one makes of the various associations of the two central figures drawn on pithos A, one can not unequivocally assume that they *must be* the god Bes or that they cannot represent Yahweh and Asherah.

Overlapping And the Unity of Each Pithos Central Scene

The analysis now turns to the use of the overlapping technique and its interpretive significance for the composition of the scenes on both pithoi. When faced with the challenge of transforming a three dimensional world into a conceptual two dimensional image, the artist—ancient and modern—can employ a wide variety of techniques in spatial relationship and arrangements to give expression to that transformation. Along these lines, written texts and visual images were combined by ancient artists in order to create a unified semantic field of meaning and, by so doing, the artist enhanced the communicative power of the resultant production. There is ample evidence both in ancient Syria and Egypt for the artistic use of the overlapping technique. Just as Beck identified numerous parallels in both form and style from Syrian and Egyptian artistic traditions in order to explicate the art historical elements in the Kuntillet 'Ajrud drawings, the technique of overlapping has its parallels in these same Syrian and Egyptian artistic traditions. In ancient Egypt, evidence for this technique is abundant and dates back at least to pre-

³⁵ See esp. Wilson 1975:77-103, Romano 1989, and Dasen 1993. Herrmann 1994:316-91 documented an impressive array of Egyptian Bes amulets found in Israel spanning the Late Bronze to Roman periods and has updated and expanded his corpus of Bes amulets in Israel in Herrmann 2002:19-26, 69-74, 113, 137-39.

³⁶ Schmidt 1995:103. The monstrous elements might also point to Yahweh and Asherah's perceived non-indigenous or outsider origins if the Mesopotamian monster traditions are relevant here.

³⁷ Schmidt 1995:75-106 and see Culican 1976:21-24.

dynastic times. In his *Principles of Egyptian Art*, originally published in 1919 and a standard in the field from what can be gathered from Egyptological colleagues, Heinrich Schäfer offered a detailed treatment of the ancient Egyptian artist's use of various techniques including overlapping.³⁸

A particularly pertinent example comes from ancient Syrian artistic tradition in the form of the two Iron age incantation texts from Arslan Tash. With the authenticity of these amulets recently reaffirmed, interpreters can no longer simply ignore them as forgeries.³⁹ Here the artistic technique of overlapping text and image is unequivocally present. Amulet or tablet one, the larger of the two, unambiguously preserves the overlap of text and image or, to be more specific, the overlap of inscribed incantation and depicted demon (see exhibit K). These inscribed and decorated tablets are roughly contemporary with the Kuntillet 'Ajrud finds and they are at home in the same north Syrian artistic tradition that Beck cited as relevant in her lengthy analysis of the Horvat Teman drawings.

The central scenes on pithos A and pithos B preserve several instances of this technique as clearly illustrated on exhibits C and D. In the pithos A drawing, the exotic figure in frontal pose located at the scene's center is, by the overlapping technique, foregrounded relative to the similar exotic figure to its immediate left (the observer's right). The overlapping of arms and legs clearly conveys the three dimensionality and depth of the scene.⁴⁰ There are also instances of overlapping that involve the left foot of the center figure

³⁸ Schäfer 1974:117-18, 177-89 and see now Robins 1994:1-29, esp. pp 6-19. In the light of the Egyptian and other ancient Near Eastern evidence, Zevit 2001:383 is certainly wrong when he states, "Overlapping figures present a phenomenon encountered in unsophisticated art".

³⁹ In 1997, this author presented a paper at the American Oriental Society meeting in Miami in defense of the authenticity of the Arslan Tash incantations and Pardee independently published an article in the 1998 issue of *Syria* (published in 2000) defending the same, cf. Pardee 1998:15-54.

⁴⁰ In 1995:98, I embraced the view that the smaller of the two figures was in consort position, its different ground line or vertical position indicative of relative depth and distance. Against the criticisms of Uehlinger 1997:145, I quote Robins 1994:19, "In pair statues, the man almost always stands or sits beside the woman on her right, which is the more important position. In two-dimensional representations, couples were portrayed by placing one figure in front of the other. The man was set ahead of the woman because this is the more prestigious placement, equivalent to the right side in three-dimensions", and (p.21) "... in order to show that the man is really on the woman's right and not her left, artists sometimes made part of the man's body overlap the woman's..."

and the cow's left foot (on the observer's right) and the overlap of the center figure's right shoulder (on the observer's left) and the so-called "ibex and lotus" motif—or what remains of it. There may be a slight overlap of the left elbow of the figure to the right of center and the chair of the lyre player. There is also an instance of overlap involving the calf's hind leg and two of the vertical strokes. So, there are four clear cases of overlap and possibly a fifth (note also the contact made between the ears of the two exotic figures). Examining the pithos B drawing in exhibit D, one can readily identify several instances of overlap in use here as well:

- The overlap of the two worshipers on the far left of the central scene.
- The partially preserved head of another worshiper above these two on the far left which strongly suggests, if not the (now faded?) concrete visual overlapping of the three, at least the mental image of that overlap.
- The overlap of the bull's hind leg and the worshiper's shoulder at the far right.
- And, of no small consequence, the overlap of the bull and the inscription on the far right margin.

A maximum total of nine overlapping elements can be accounted for in these two scenes. It is quite clear that the artist who composed the respective central scenes in pithos A and pithos B, deliberately and unabashedly employed the technique of overlapping. One might suspect that some of the overlapping was accidental, or unavoidable owing to space limitations,⁴¹ or the work of a subsequent hand as in the case perhaps of the overlap of the cow in pithos A or the bull in pithos B with the figures in their respective central scenes. But it is more likely the case, given the Egyptian precedent, that an artist employed overlapping as a means of relating spatially several of the major figures on both central scenes. Minimally speaking, this would include the two exotic figures centrally located on pithos A and two, possibly three, of the worshipers positioned at the far left (or as shall be argued shortly, at the front) of the processional line on pithos B.

The above analysis makes highly questionable the view that randomness pervades these drawings. It also points to the greater likelihood that the same hand composed all the major elements in each scene. The hypothesis of multiple hands, while plausible in the case

⁴¹ So Beck 1982:32.

of isolated elements on the margins of both scenes, must be restricted in scope and eliminated altogether in the case of the figures and the inscriptions in the two central scenes. For some, a multi-authored composition might find confirmation in the relative thickness of ink lines used to illustrate the various compositional elements in both scenes (see exhibits C and D), but line thickness is hardly a reliable indicator of multiple hands. It can be equally explained as purposeful artistic variation.

When one can document similarity of artistic style generally as well as cite specific examples of artistic technique, one has the kind of contextual and comparative evidence with which to eliminate less than compelling objections and to identify more probable options. That the overlap of the inscription and the larger central figure's headdress on pithos A is deliberate and meaningful, coincides with the composer's application of overlapping elsewhere in these scenes and with what we presently know about ancient artistic technique more generally.

Other Artistic Techniques and the Unity of the Two Central Scenes

The investigation will now extend the 'semiotic' approach initiated in 1995 to a comparison of the drawings and inscriptions on pithos A with the drawings and inscriptions on pithos B. As my point of departure, I quote an observation offered by Keel and Uehlinger. They suggest that "the key to understanding the entire assemblage is the drawing of the procession of worshipers on pithos B".⁴² This scene offers the most instructive functional analogy to the blessing formulae and wishes for blessing attested among the drawings of both pithoi. No one as far as this author knows has suggested that a range of artistic techniques might be shared by these two scenes. In fact, Uehlinger recently invoked the absence of such a comparison in the secondary literature as an argument against the connection of inscription and image on pithos A at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. I quote, "to my knowledge, no one has ever suggested that the five figures bU-Y on pithos B should be related to 'Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah' although inscription P.b2 runs nicely above them ...".⁴³

The six "pilgrim" figures on pithos B can be related to the inscrip-

⁴² Keel and Uehlinger 1998:241-2.

⁴³ Uehlinger 1997:146.

tion that is located above them just as the central figures on pithos A can be related to the inscription above them. Both sets of drawings are situated in center position in their respective contexts. The scenes on both pithoi are described by Beck as equidistant from the handles on both jars, i.e., at the midway point between the handles. Furthermore, both central scenes were completed in a style utilizing a rather thick or heavy line. Others have suggested that the variation in line thickness distinguishes them from the drawings of the various animals in the wider peripheral field like the cow and calf motif preserved in both scenes and that this in turn implies the presence of multiple hands and randomness. While the differing thickness of ink line may be suggestive of differing hands, Beck was far more cautious on this point than typically represented in the literature. As noted above, thickness of line might convey nothing more than the purposeful alterations in style by a single hand in both central scenes. In fact, in the case at hand, it may have served to highlight the figures at the center of both scenes.

The Association of Ideas

Another technique widely attested in Egyptian art is the “association of ideas” wherein individual elements that share a common theme are repeated or arranged in such a manner so as to convey a complete or unified composition.⁴⁴ The cow and calf motif or type-scene appears on both pithoi drawings at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and in both cases, the motif has the same orientation relative to the central scene; namely, below and to the left of center (cf. exhibits C and D). This use of the cow and calf motif is one of the most straightforward examples of the “association of ideas” in these drawings and serves to convey the idea that the central scene on pithos A along with the central scene on pithos B are two parts of a larger unified field of meaning. One could argue that the artist tied the central scene on pithos A and the central scene on pithos B together by implementing two strategies. The artist repeated the cow and calf type-scene on both jars and the artist duplicated its general orientation on both central scenes—to the left of and below the central scene. The artist thereby highlighted the theme of fecundity or blessing in nature as a major theme common to both pithoi drawings.

⁴⁴ Schäfer 1974:160-62, 166,193 and cf. Van Lepp 1996:101-02.

Another example of the association of ideas and its unifying function is pertinent here. It is given similar artistic expression through the same techniques used in the rendering of the cow and calf motif; namely, the repetition of religious theme and the duplication of spatial arrangement and it is hardly coincidental that the theme is again the theme of divine blessing. The expression in this instance, however, is not strictly pictorial although it is certainly visual. It is epigraphic rather than anepigraphic. The *inscribed* theme of divine benediction finds unequivocal expression in both central scenes in the repetition of the blessing formula and the parallel positioning of those inscriptions at the upper edge of both scenes. Exhibits C and D clearly illustrate these parallel components.

Two other examples of the “association of ideas” offer further support for the thesis that the central scenes on both jars are two parts of a larger unified whole. They do not function, however, in exactly the same manner as those just surveyed. The chariot horse with rider on pithos A (exhibit C) shares the same position as the ibex of the partially preserved “ibex and lotus” type-scene on pithos B (exhibit D), that is, relative to their respective central scenes. Both are located to the immediate right of center (the observer’s left). The lyre player on pithos A and the bull on pithos B are situated in like position vis-à-vis their respective central scenes as well: to the immediate left (the observer’s right), and both overlap the compositional elements on their immediate right (or the observer’s left). In these instances, duplication of spatial arrangement or position is present, but the theme of blessing is no longer the focal point, rather it is the complementary theme of processional adoration that is highlighted. These instances of parallel spatial arrangement or positioning strengthen the proposal made earlier that the two central scenes on the pithoi were designed as related scenes; two parts of a larger thematic whole.

While these two scenes share numerous elements, they were not designed to convey identical themes. Rather, they contain complementary religious motifs. In the pithos A scene, two deities are located beneath the overlapping inscription that by design identifies them as Yahweh and Asherah. In the drawing on pithos B, six worshipers are located beneath an inscription that mentions these same two deities, Yahweh and Asherah, but the deities are not explicitly represented, at least not in the form or fashion that they are in pithos A. How then, do the two scenes relate on this point if indeed that was their ancient artistic design?

On the one hand, the pithos A scene preserves the *iconic* representation of the deities suggesting the deities' glorious imminence, but with earthly worshipers absent. On the other hand, pithos B preserves a scene in which worshipers are present but the deities are pictorially absent though they are mentioned in the inscription positioned immediately above the scene. Pithos B contains the artistic rendering of what has been referred to as *empty space aniconism*. In cults that employed empty space aniconism, the presence of the divine was invisibly communicated through the absence of anthropomorphic, theriomorphic, physiomorphic, or composite images of the deities yet complemented by the demarcation of sacred space using, for example, an empty throne, an empty room, a riderless horse, etc.⁴⁵ In the case of the pithos B scene, the ancient author sought to convey the transcendence of the gods as the fitting complement to the divine imminence conveyed in the pithos A scene. This finds confirmation in several factors. The worshipers in the pithos B scene are the functional equivalent to votive figures in the ritual cult. They serve to symbolize the act of worship and to demarcate the lower boundary of sacred space. The accompanying inscription "writ in the sky" mentioning Yahweh and Asherah located immediately above the empty space in the center of the scene functions to delimit the upper boundary of that same sacred space. The presence and position of this inscription evokes the similarly positioned inscription in the pithos A scene where the combination of text and image overtly visualizes the divine presence at the center of the scene for the viewer. The parallels shared by these two scenes noted previously strongly suggest that the empty space in the pithos B scene is demarcated as sacred space where the divine presence was visually *imagined* by the viewer. The divine images most readily called to mind would be those immediately accessible on the pithos A scene.

The complementary ritual scenes preserved on pithos A and pithos B have their functional analogue in the complementary iconic and aniconic cults that actually existed within a common religious tradition of the contemporary ancient Near East. As most recently proposed by Mettinger, regional cults comprised of open-air sanctuaries, employing empty space aniconism, and dedicated to a particular deity or group of deities existed alongside urban temple cults

⁴⁵ Cf. e.g., Mettinger 1995:19-38.

housing icons and images of these same deities.⁴⁶ The reference to Samaria in the phrase, “Yahweh of Samaria,” in the pithos A inscription is compatible with an urban temple court yard serving as the backdrop for the pithos A scene while the mention of the southern desert region of Teman in the phrase, “Yahweh of Teman,” of both pithos B inscriptions is in keeping with a rural open air sanctuary as the imagined backdrop of the pithos B scene.⁴⁷

Rabattement or 90 Degree Transposition

Having thus far set forth the case for a single composer responsible for both pithoi scenes as well as for their complementarity, there remains the perplexing problem of interpreting what appears to be the hodge-podge positioning of several figures in both scenes or what some have referred to as graffiti-like renderings. The directional orientation of elements is varied: some rendered in profile face right, while others face left, yet still others possess frontal orientation. The same goes for the variable positioning of elements along both horizontal and vertical planes; some are placed on the right edge, others the left, and still others in the center or near the top. It is again, Egyptian artistic technique that provides a possible interpretation of the enigmatic orientation of elements contained in the pithoi scenes from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. The individual who composed the pithoi scenes shows some familiarity the technique of rabattement or 90 degree transposition.

While the Egyptians used a variety of artistic conventions of depth of field and perspective familiar to modern artists, in some instances, they applied different logical processes to transfer information about the three dimensional Egyptian world onto the two dimensional surfaces of pottery and architectural walls. In addition to employing the techniques of overlap and the association of ideas to express spatial relationships and arrangements, the Egyptians would transpose an object 90 degrees to allow for the visualization of the spatial relationship between one element, or sets of compositional elements, and the represented surroundings. This allowed the artist and the

⁴⁶ Mettinger 1995. His focus on what he refers to as material aniconism is of only marginal relevance to the present thesis.

⁴⁷ The same might apply in the case of the chariot and lyre player in the pithos A urban temple scene when viewed over against the ibex and bull in the corresponding positions on the pithos B rural open air sanctuary scene.

Exhibit E

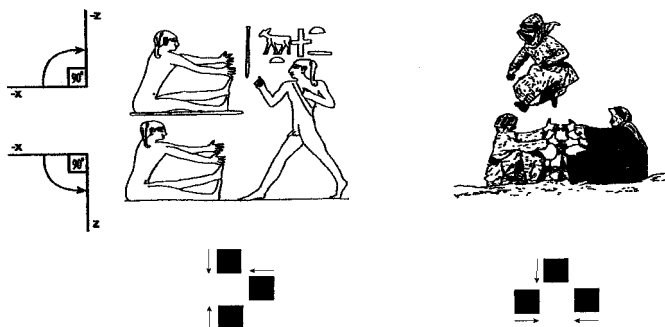
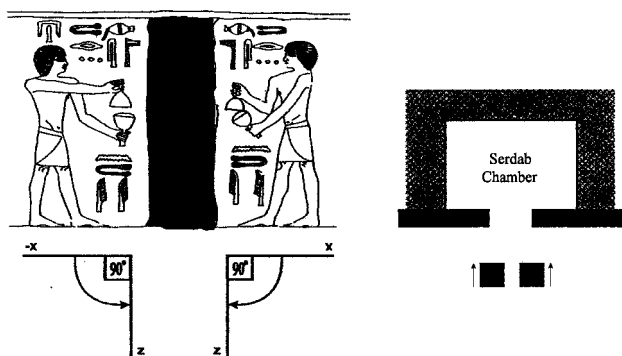


Exhibit F



viewer to imagine an object or image at once appearing flat on a pottery surface or wall, yet at the same time no longer restricted to that flat surface.⁴⁸

A common use of rabattement and one that had a long-established tradition in Egypt, was the portrayal of the human figure in the “three quarter view.” In the three quarter view, the various parts of the human figure are portrayed in side view except for the shoulders and torso. These are transposed 90 degrees thereby preserving an element of three-dimensionality (cf. the seated Pharaoh in

⁴⁸ Van Lepp 1996:103-20.

Exhibit G

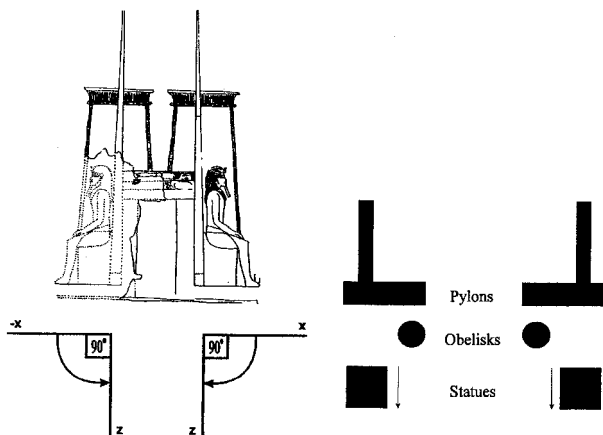


Exhibit H

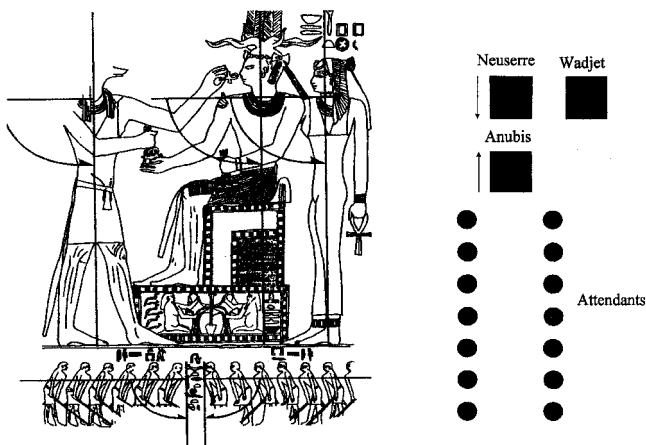


exhibit H). It is neither consistent with natural appearance nor congruent with any form of the perspective view.⁴⁹

A particular application of this technique was used on elements which appear flat on the wall or pottery surface, but are intended to spatially project out from the wall (or from the X axis onto the Z axis). In the tomb of Ptahhotep there is a unique scene of three boys participating in a game still played in Egypt today (exhibit E).

⁴⁹ Schäfer, 1974:306-09, and cf. the remarks in Robins 1994:3, 13-15.

When one compares this scene with a modern illustrated photo of boys playing the that game, one is able to reconstruct the proper spatial arrangement of the boys illustrated in Ptahhotep's tomb by invoking the artistic technique of rabattement.

In an Old Kingdom scene from the tomb of Ti, two mortuary priests are depicted flanking the opening that leads to the serdab or funerary chamber (exhibit F). They are portrayed offering incense to Ti's inner statue. Since comparable scenes indicate that priests offered incense directly in front of the mortuary statues, their spatial arrangement must be different from that which appears on the two dimensional surface of this scene. By transposing the priests 90 degrees, they are positioned in front of the statues. A similar treatment of this type of rabattement is attested in a New Kingdom scene where two colossal statues are depicted with a parallel orientation to the temple pylons (exhibit G). Existing temple facades indicate that colossal statues had a frontal orientation. The two colossal statues have been transposed 90 degrees by the artist to fit onto the two dimensional wall scene.

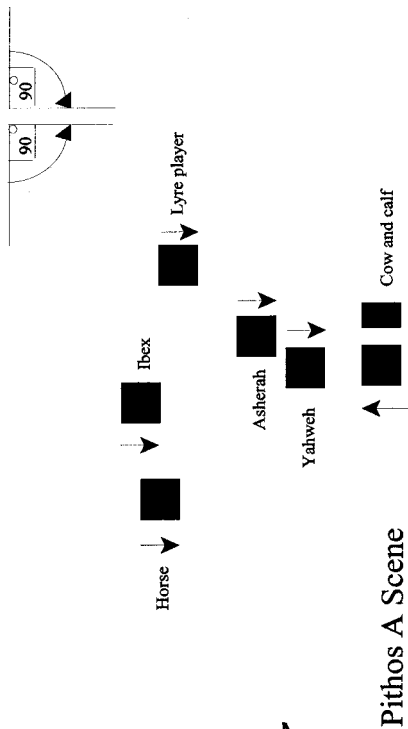
In a 5th dynasty representation of Neuserre, Pharaoh is shown seated on his throne between Anubis and the goddess Wadjet (exhibit H). Below this triad are two opposing rows of men facing each other at the center. Anubis stands before the king presenting him with ankh symbols. Wadjet has her arm around Neuserre's right shoulder which indicates that they are situated side by side given the three-quartered positioning of Pharaoh. Since there are two rows of men frontal to this triad, the artist employed a different form of rabattement. In this case, the head, eyes, hips and legs of the king and Wadjet as well as the king's throne should be projected 90 degrees from the X axis to the Z axis. This produces a frontal viewing of Nueserre and Wadjet by the attendants placed before them and is comparable to statuary of human couples.⁵⁰ Though the transposition of Anubis positions his back to the viewer, he is frontal to Neuserre who is the focal point of the scene. The attendants below are accompanied by the text "(making) a good path in front of the king" *w3t nfrt hft-hr* which suggests that they too should be transposed 90 degrees and facing Nueserre in a gesture of adoration.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Cf. Russmann 1989:plate 14 for the statue of the dwarf Seneb and his family and Robins 1994:19.

⁵¹ This example also indicates that sub-registers, like ground lines, could be used to portray figures at various horizontal distances with upper sub-register individuals set at a further distance from the observer.

Exhibit I

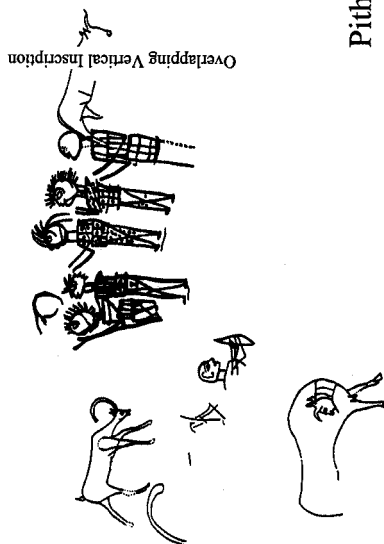
Overlapping Inscription



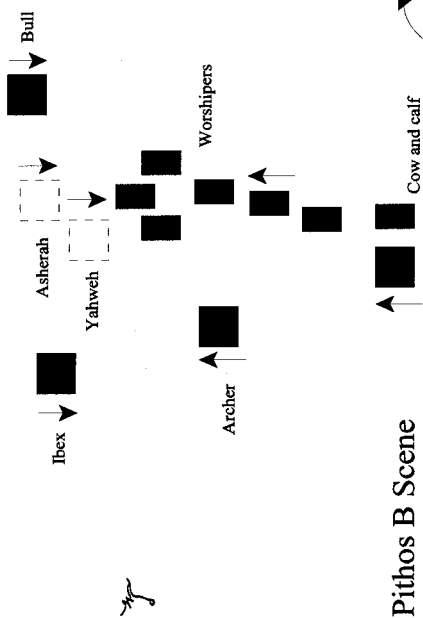
Pitthos A Scene

Exhibit J

(Inscription)

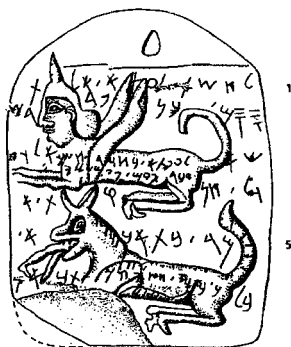


Overlapping Vertical Inscription



Pitthos B Scene

Exhibit K



Tablet 1 (recto)



Tablet 1 (verso)

In the pithos A scene from Horvat Teman, the 90 degree transposing of the cow and calf, the lyre player, ibex, and the chariot with rider, results in their orientation either towards the two figures (and with their back to the viewer) as is preferable in the case of the cow and calf or in an orientation facing the same direction as the two central figures which is the option preferred in the case of the chariot rider, the ibex, and the lyre player. The difference in the direction of their respective 90 degree transpositions is a factor of their depth of field as expressed in their ground lines relative to the central figures. Both the chariot with rider and the lyre player occupy a ground line at a higher elevation on the scene than the two

Bes-like figures and are therefore set at a distance farther from the viewer than the two figures. This can be understood either as indicative of their accompanying the two Bes-like figures in a processional march or as standing stationary at their side. The position of the ground line of the cow and calf in the foreground relative to these two figures favors their being transposed so as to face the two Bes-like figures in a gesture of adoration. If any artistic clues to movement among the elements can be convincingly identified, perhaps, the cow and calf are to be visualized as approaching the two deities in a procession.⁵² Exhibit I illustrates how each of the elements in the pithos A drawing can be reconstructed by reversing the ancient artist's technique of transpositioning along three dimensional lines from the X axis to the Z axis.

In the case of the pithos B scene a similar reconstruction can be proposed based on the combination of 90 degree transposition and depth of field or perspective. Matters are complicated somewhat, however, by the deliberate omission of the two Bes-like figures in this scene. If, however, the same hand is responsible for both scenes as argued above, then it is very likely that the inscription "writ in the sky" presupposes the *empty space aniconic* presence of the two deities. Assuming we have accurately rendered the ancient artist's expressed design in this respect, the ground lines of the ibex and bull would be arguably higher in elevation on the scene than the ground lines created by the feet of the two deities assuming that they held an imaginary position immediately under and overlapping the inscription as they do in the scene on pithos A.⁵³ This would result in the ibex and the bull being transposed 90 degrees in the opposite direction to the six worshipers, the archer, and the cow and calf since the latter all hold positions or ground lines in the foreground relative to the imagined ground lines of the two Bes-like figures. In a fashion similar to that identified in the pithos A scene, the ibex and bull in the pithos B scene accompany the two deities in a procession or they stand to either side of the stationary deities, while the six worshipers, the archer, and the cow and calf all face the deities and their entourage in a gesture of adoration while possibly approaching that sacred space which the deities (invisibly) occupied in a procession. Exhibits I and J illustrate these various elements from the pithos A

⁵² Some interpreters have suggested that the ground lines of the central figures point to the act of dancing on the part of one or both of these Bes-like figures.

⁵³ In the absence of a full photographic inventory of the pithos B scene, one can only approximate the imagined placement of the inscription "writ in the sky".

and pithos B scenes in their imaginary three dimensional ritual scenes, having been transposed 90 degrees and assigned their relative horizontal and vertical positions according to the artistic conventions of the day.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This investigation began by reviewing as well as offering some new support for previous arguments and evidence in favor of connecting image and inscription in the scenes on pithos A and pithos B from Kuntillet 'Ajrud. This provided the needed context in support of several new lines of argument that confirm the ancient artist's employment of overlapping in these two central scenes. This technique incorporated both image and text and conveyed to the ancient viewer that the scene on pithos A and the scene on pithos B each possessed a unified field of meaning.

The possible application of other ancient artistic techniques in these scenes was then explored. It was proposed that the "association of ideas" and the technique of rabattement or the transposition of an element or elements by 90 degrees were also implemented by the ancient composer. Based on the presence of these various techniques, it was suggested that the two pithoi scenes from Horvat Teman (exhibits C and D) were designed to convey complementary ritual scenes. For the ancient observer, pithos A embodied a theophany assuring divine imminence by means of a conventional iconic form that overlapped with an inscribed benediction all within the context of an urban cultic enclosure and public procession. The use of empty space aniconism set within the context of a rural, open air sanctuary in the scene on pithos B along with the divine benediction "writ in the sky," highlighted for the ancient viewer, the transcendence of Yahweh and his Asherah who invisibly dwelt in the heavens exercising their power to bless those who paid homage to them.

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⁵⁴ The tilt of the hind legs of the ibex and the bull might indicate a shallow descent from a slightly higher elevation to the sacred ground of an open air sanctuary.

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