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Source: *Vetus Testamentum*, Apr., 1987, Vol. 37, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 1987), pp. 180-213

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1517718

*Vetus Testamentum* XXXVII, 2 (1987)

# SOME DRAWINGS AND INSCRIPTIONS ON TWO PITHOI FROM KUNTILLET ʿAJRUD[1]

by

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Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teiman) is located approximately 50 km. south of Kadesh-barnea in northern Sinai, on a hill overlooking Wadi Quraiya (grid ref. 094-954). In Arabic, "Kuntillet ʿAjrud" means "Solitary Hill of the Wells" (Meshel 1979a, p. 28). As this name implies, the wells which can be found in the vicinity are the main source of water for the site, which lies near an intersection of several ancient routes traversing the desert: the Darb el-Ghazza from Gaza through Rafia and Kadesh-barnea, past Kuntillet ʿAjrud and then continuing south to Eilat; the east-west route following the W. Quraiya; and a branch route to the south to southern Sinai via Themed. In three seasons of excavations over the years 1975-6, a team from the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, under the direction of Zeʾev Meshel, uncovered remains of what Meshel believes to be an Iron II religious centre (Meshel 1979a, p. 27).

In the site itself, which is on a narrow E-W plateau, there are remains of only two structures (see fig. 1). One small building has been almost completely eroded away, but the other building is preserved up to a height of 1.6 m., and takes up the whole width of the western end of the narrow plateau. The orientation of this building is E-W, and the entrance is by a small "court" on the eastern side. One then passes through an entry-way to a long narrow room oriented N-S. Both the entry-way and the long narrow

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[1] I wish to express my gratitude to several people for their help and assistance in the writing of this article. Special thanks are due to Professor J. A. Emerton and Dr G. I. Davies of Cambridge, and to Dr G. J. Cowling of Macquarie University, Sydney, for reading the article in draft and for making many helpful suggestions. I wish also to thank Mrs Valerie Collis of Cambridge for translating the article by Catastini for me, and Mr John Ray of Cambridge for discussing Egyptian art and iconography with me; and see also n. 2.

room are lined with benches. This second room is called the "bench room". At both the northern and southern ends of the bench room respectively are single openings in the wall above the benches, which lead into small rooms that have no other means of entry. Beyond the bench room to the west lies a large inner courtyard which was empty except for the remains of three ovens, evidently used consecutively, since the floor associated with the second oven covers the first one, and the floor for the third oven covers the second. In the SW and SE corners of the inner courtyard are steps, presumably leading to a first floor which has not been preserved. Along the southern and western sides of the courtyard are a few more narrow rooms, evidently used for storage. For a fuller description and plans of the site see Meshel 1978a, 1978b, 1979a, and Beck 1982.

Several pieces of frescoes and inscribed wall fragments with inscriptions of a prayerful or dedicatory nature were discovered in the bench room and in a few of the adjoining rooms. Originally, these fragments would have been on the walls and door jambs (Meshel 1979a, p. 30).

Fragments of two large pithoi were discovered as well. Pithos A (see below and figs 1 and 2) was reconstructed from sherds found in the bench room, north of the central passageway which leads from the small outer "court" through the bench room and then into the large inner courtyard. Pithos B (see below and figs 1 and 3) was reconstructed from sherds found in the NE corner of the inner courtyard, on the other side of a wall from Pithos A. The excavator believes that this pithos also was originally to be found in the bench room (Beck, p. 4). These two large pithoi are covered with drawings and inscriptions. It is these drawings and inscriptions that most concern us here.

The drawings on the pithoi are mainly animal motifs, including horses, ibexes, a boar, lions, a tree flanked by two ibexes, and a cow and calf, but also including an archer, a procession of "worshippers", and two "Bes" figures and a lyre player. In addition to these two pithoi, there are painted sherds that do not belong to any reconstructible vessels. One of these fragments depicts a boar, and a large seated figure has been pieced together from the other sherds.

Most of the inscriptions found in the site are letters incised on the pottery, some before and some after firing; inscriptions incised on stone vessels; or inscriptions written in black or red ink on

plaster. For these inscriptions see Meshel 1978a and Weinfeld 1984. (For a different translation of some of these inscriptions, see Catastini.) The inscriptions that mainly concern us here are three longer inscriptions found on the pithoi, enumerated below.

In addition to these longer inscriptions, there are several names, letters, and abecedaries (in which *pe* precedes *ʿayin*) painted on the pithoi. These will be considered only as they affect the three main inscriptions discussed below.

## A. *The Inscriptions*

The inscription of most interest is no. 1, which appears above the heads of the two "Bes" figures, and indeed overlaps with the headdress of one of them (see fig. 2). It has been suggested that the inscription serves as a "commentary" on the drawing, or vice versa. However, each of the inscriptions will first be discussed individually, without any reference to the drawings. Only then will the drawings be considered, and any possible relationship with the inscriptions explored.

(1) *ʾmr. ʾ...h...k. ʾmr. lyhl[lʾl] wlywʿśh. w... brkt. ʾtkm. lyhwh. šmrn. wlʾšrth.*

"X says: say to Yehal[lelʾel] and to Yoʿasah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his asherah."

In the gap between *ʾmr* and *ʾmr*, Meshel now restores *ʾ[šyw] h[ml]k*. (Weinfeld 1980, p. 284, and Meshel 1986). He believes that *ʾšyw* is a valid transposition of Joash, citing *ywʾḥz* as opposed to *ʾḥzyw* as an example (Weinfeld 1980, p. 284). Therefore, he now dates the site to the reign of Joash, king of Israel. While this reading is possible for the lacuna in the inscription (the spacing for the *h* of *hmlk* seems acceptable, and there are tails of letters where the *w* of *ʾšyw* and the *m* of *hmlk* would be), it seems precarious to extend the dating of the finds even by a few years on the basis of this reading (Meshel dates the pottery and finds to the mid 9th to the mid 8th centuries BC, but previously suggested a date during Athaliah's reign, based on historical grounds; cf. Meshel 1979a, p. 34). Furthermore, the only fully preserved personal name in this inscription has the theophoric element in the intitial position. It seems a tenuous argument, therefore, to base the reconstruction of the

lacuna on a transposition of the conjectured elements in the initial, broken personal name to place the theophoric element at the end.

It is possible that any number of different constructions may fit here, other than Meshel's suggestion. The first word could be *ʾbyw*, followed by *hmlk*, or may even be *ʾbyhw* or *ʾbywnh*. Unless more of the inscription can be restored, or until more information is available, it is best to leave this lacuna as a tantalizing gap, although Meshel's suggestion is an attractive one.

There seems to be no dispute over the rest of the transcription, but there is some controversy as to the translation. In the Hebrew part of Meshel's 1978a publication, he translates *brkt* as the first person singular Piel perfect without a *mater lectionis*, or "I blessed". In the English version, however, he translates *brkt* as "May you be blessed", which is inconsistent. This translation is probably meant to be simply a "loose rendering" of the text, as the former reading is grammatically the correct one. Meshel originally translated the rest of the inscription "[I bless you] by Yahweh our guardian and by his asherah" (although he now translates *šmrn* as "Samaria"). Emerton (1982, p. 3) agrees with this treatment of *brkt* as a Piel perfect, but differs in the translation of *šmrn*. Following a suggestion by Gilula (1979), Emerton translates *yhwh. šmrn* as "Yahweh of Samaria". This interpretation is confirmed by the second pithos discovered at ʿAjrud, in reading no. 2 below, mentioning *yhwh. tmn. wʾšrth*, "Yahweh of Teman and his asherah" (Emerton, p. 3, and cf. Weinfeld 1984, p. 125). This interpretation now seems to be generally accepted by scholars (cf. also Weinfeld 1980, p. 284, and Lemaire 1984a, p. 132, among others), and Meshel himself accepts this reading (Weinfeld 1980, p. 284, and Meshel 1986). Lemaire (1984a, p. 132) therefore believes that "Yahweh of Samaria" is parallel to the expression "God of Jerusalem" found at Khirbet Beit Lei.

The discovery at a site so far south as Kuntillet ʿAjrud of an inscription mentioning Yahweh of Samaria has interesting ramifications. Lemaire suggests that the name "Yahweh of Samaria" makes sense only if a north Israelite wrote it (1984a, p. 133). Otherwise why would a Judaean or southerner invoke Yahweh of Samaria? Furthermore, the discovery of an inscription mentioning Yahweh of Teman is apparently indicative of a region in the south of Palestine, perhaps in the area of ancient Edom (Emerton, p. 9).

These references to the God of Samaria and Teman may help to illustrate the religious nature of the site. It is an evocative setting, and although only a slight mound, it is the highest hillock in the vicinity. Many of the other inscriptions on the wall plaster are of a religious nature, invoking Yahweh for a blessing (Meshel 1978b, Weinfeld 1984), and may indicate that Kuntillet ʿAjrud was some sort of pilgrimage spot; or at least perhaps a shrine to Yahweh along the much frequented trade routes mentioned above. A recent analysis of the pottery found at ʿAjrud has shown that most of the vessels were made in Judah, the southern coastal region, and the north of Israel. The site apparently lacked any locally made pottery (Gunneweg, Perlman, and Meshel). This appears to uphold Meshel's assumption that the site was a religious centre "inhabited by a group of priests who gave blessings to travellers journeying to the south", as well as his conclusion that "the site functioned for only a short period at the beginning of the eighth century B.C.E. and had connections not only with Judah but also with Israel" (ibid., p. 270).

However, there are a few problems with the identification of the site as a religious centre. For reasons which I hope to discuss elsewhere in another article, I believe that ʿAjrud is to be seen as a caravanserai, or way station, rather than a shrine or religious centre. Nevertheless, this would not eliminate the religious or emotive atmosphere of the site, which could be accepted without the actual presence of a shrine or religious centre.

Several Phoenician inscriptions were discovered at ʿAjrud, which seems to indicate a diversity of peoples using the site (Meshel 1978b). This may strengthen the argument for a way station, and not a religious centre, as Meshel has suggested (1979a, p. 27). However, these inscriptions do not concern us here. Another indication of different peoples can be found in the types of names used. Some of the names discovered at ʿAjrud end with the *-yw* suffix, which is usually considered to be Israelite (Millard, p. 212, and Lemaire 1984b, p. 44, among others), and yet my reconstruction of *yhl[lʾl]* in the lacuna of the text above is attested as a Judaean name, although late. In 1 Chron. iv 16 it is used for a man of Judah. The name also appears in 2 Chron. xxix 12 as that of a Levite. Although only *yhl* is preserved from the name, Yehallelʾel seems a plausible reconstruction. If this is accepted, it is interesting to note that a Judaean name appears in an inscription invoking

Yahweh of Samaria (and cf. below for inscription no. 2 where the opposite occurs).

For a brief discussion of *ʾšrth* and some of its various implications, see the concluding remarks below.

(2) *ʾmr ʾmryw ʾmr l.ʾdny hšlm. ʾt brktk. lyhwh tmn wlʾšrth. ybrk. wyšmrk wyhy ʿm. ʾd[n]y...k*
"Amaryaw says: say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep you and be with my lord ..."

Like no. 1 above, this inscription seems to be a request for blessing and divine protection. Here the second person singular suffix *k* is affixed to the verb *brkt*, whereas in the first inscription discussed above the second person plural suffix *km* is used with the direct object marker *ʾt*.

In Meshel's gap between *l.ʾdny* and *brktk.*, where he had only *h...ʾt.* (1978a), Chase reads *hšlm. ʾt*, which Meshel now accepts (Meshel 1986). The lacuna arose because at this point in the text there is an abecedary written over the inscription. What Chase has done is to look underneath the abecedary in order to discern what is written beneath. Underneath the abecedary she reads *šlm*, following the initial *h* (Chase, p. 64). This provides us with *hšlm ʾt*, as mentioned above. The restored text, then, leaves us with a greeting formula known from other inscriptions. The most striking parallel is that of the Phoenician papyrus from Saqqara, in which there is a standard address formula, followed by a question concerning the well-being of the one to whom the text is addressed, and then a blessing (Chase, p. 65).

Chase provides other parallels from the Arad and Wadi Murabbaʿat Letters as well as an Aramaic ostracon from Elephantine (p. 65, and cf. also Lemaire 1978, p. 233, who cites many more of these greeting and blessing formulae and discusses them at length). The form of the interrogative *h* plus *šlm* is also attested in Biblical Hebrew, although not in a letter formula (Chase, p. 66). Chase's arguments are certainly attractive, and she presents a convincing case. When I was in Jerusalem in August 1986, I was able to see this inscription on exhibition in the Israel Museum. I tried to get permission to see it close up, but was unsuccessful, and so I had to be content with examining it through the glass showcase.

However, even from that distance, I was able to see the letters well enough to convince myself that Chase's reading is correct. The explanation on the showcase at the museum has *hmlk* in this gap, perhaps to conform to Meshel's reading *ʾšyw hmlk* in the first inscription. However, as mentioned above, Meshel now accepts this reading of *hšlm ʾt*.

The word Teman is another interesting term, as it is apparently a region instead of a city, like Samaria. Meshel at first did not find the term used here, and had instead a gap between *lyhwh* and *wlʾšrth*. Gilula and Lemaire read *tmn* here, and Meshel now agrees with this reading (Weinfeld 1980, p. 284, and now Meshel 1986). So how does this identification affect the interpretation of inscription no. 2? Emerton presents a thorough study of the term "Yahweh of Teman" and its implications. He believes that Teman denotes a region of Edom, and that "it is unlikely that the phrase at Kuntillet ʿAjrud refers to a cult of Yahweh in Teman, unless we are to suppose that, as in the Kenite hypothesis, Yahweh was worshipped by nomadic groups in the south, and that the cult continued as late as c. 800 B.C. and was to be found in Edom. The meaning is likely to be similar to that to [*sic*] Hab 3 3: it is from the southern region that Yahweh has come, and it belongs in a special way to him" (p. 10). Weinfeld, on the other hand, believes that Yahweh of Teman was worshipped in the southern district, close to Mount Seir and Mount Sinai (1984, p. 126). This is similar to Catastini's view that there was a "school of prophets" operating in the area of ʿAjrud (p. 131). However, it is difficult to tell precisely how far west Edom's influence extended at this time. Therefore, whether there was a specific southern cult here during this period with its own priests (as Meshel seems to believe; see above), or whether the blessing of Yahweh of Teman was simply seen to be propitious for travellers through the southern region, it is reasonable to conclude from the ʿAjrud inscriptions that wayfarers invoked Yahweh's special protection for their journey as they travelled through this potentially hostile region.

It is also interesting that here Yahweh of Teman, presumably a southern deity, occurs in the same inscription as *ʾmryw*, possibly a northern name (and cf. above for the opposite occurrence).

The second part of this inscription, *ybrk. wyšmrk wyhy ʿm. ʾd[n]y...*, "May he bless you and keep you and be with my lord ...", Weinfeld believes to be like Gen. xxviii 15, when Jacob

is about to journey to Haran (1984, pp. 124-5). Yet it has an even closer affinity with Num. vi 24, *ybrkk yhwh wyšmrk*... In this case, as with the ʿAjrud inscriptions, the speaker (in the case of Numbers the speaker is Yahweh himself) tells a second person to pronounce the blessing to a third person or group of people. Concerning this text, it is interesting to note that two 7th century BC silver amulets (the larger of which I discovered) from an excavation directed by Gabriel Barkay of Tel Aviv University in a burial cave on the shoulder of the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem, have recently been deciphered, and were found to contain this blessing which is also found in Numbers (Barkay, p. 35). The passage in Numbers has *ybrkk*, whereas these amulets from the 7th century BC and inscription no. 2 from the 8th century BC both have *ybrk*.

(3) *kl ʾšr yšʾl mʾš ḥnn... wntn lh yhw klbbh*
"Whatever he asks from a man, may it be favoured ... and let Yahweh give unto him as he wishes (according to his heart)".

This inscription was not included in the inscriptions which Meshel originally published (1978a), and was only recently published by Weinfeld (1984). Therefore, it has escaped close scrutiny by most scholars. Even Weinfeld does not discuss it at length. It should be noted, however, that here there is no final *h* on the divine name. Although Lemaire does not comment on this inscription specifically, in another case at ʿAjrud where the divine name is inscribed on a stone without the final *h* he believes that the engraver forgot the final letter. "On notera que cette inscription sur pierre semble avoir une graphie anormale de *yhwh* écrit *yhw* à la fin de l'inscription alors que la graphie *yhwh* est bien attestée dans les autres inscriptions, aussi bien paléo-hébraïques que phéniciennes, de Kuntillet ʿAjrud. Plutôt que d'une différence dialectale, il s'agit vraisemblablement là d'une simple faute d'orthographe du graveur, soit par oubli du *h* final..." (1984a, pp. 134-5).

When I studied this pithos in the Israel Museum, I noticed that above this inscription is one of the other texts mentioning Yahweh of Teman (Meshel counts five of them). It reads *lyhwh. htm̊n. wlʾšrth*. It is curious that here *tmn* has a prefixed *h*, whereas it does not in the other occurrences. Also, the reading of the *m* is not certain. Therefore this inscription deserves much closer scrutiny (which I was unfortunately not allowed to undertake) to try to

determine the exact reading of the text. Indeed, if this does not read *tmn*, then the whole interpretation of these texts may need to be re-examined.

I also noticed that this inscription no. 3 seemed to continue from inscription no. 2, albeit in a straight line following the shoulder of the pithos, whereas inscription no. 2 is in a vertical format. As there are several different abecedaries in this area of the pithos, I was unable to determine from where I was whether any sort of connection could be made between these two inscriptions, and indeed with the *lyhwh. htm̊n. wl'šrth.* mentioned above.

## B. *The Drawings*

We now turn to the drawings on the pithoi. On Pithos A, below inscription no. 1 mentioned above, is a drawing of two standing figures and one seated lyre player (see fig. 2). The inscription overlaps with the headdress of the larger standing figure on the left. These figures are the source of great controversy. Meshel (1979a, p. 30) identifies the three as a seated woman playing a lyre, the god Bes in the centre, and another unidentified deity on the left. He finds it enticing to try to find a connection between the inscription and the drawings. He notes that the faces and ears of the two standing figures resemble those of a cow or calf, and therefore sees a possible connection with the statues of the golden calf at Bethel and Dan. He further postulates that two of the figures may depict "Yahweh and his consort", although he does not make it clear which of the three figures represents which deity (1979a, p. 31).

Gilula (1978-9, pp. 130-3), perhaps following Meshel, believes that here we have a depiction of a cow or a calf, and a woman. The cow (or bull) he identifies as Yahweh, who in Gilula's opinion was worshipped in the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the form of a calf (unless the calf was seen to be Yahweh's pedestal). The other figure Gilula believes to be a woman, perhaps Asherah, mainly because of the breasts (see below). Kempinski, who accompanied Gilula when he went to see the pithoi (p. 129), suggested that the inscription was a commentary on the drawing. If this is indeed the case, Gilula postulates that here we have a depiction of Yahweh and Asherah, and that the mention of Asherah in conjunction with Yahweh is to be understood as identifying her as his consort (pp. 134-5).

Fritz (p. 49) agrees that these two figures have cow faces. Keel, however, refutes both Gilula and Fritz, in stating that a cow face is inconsistent with the iconography of Bes in general, and does not seem to be related to cow drawings in particular (1980b, p. 170).

So how is this scene (if indeed the three figures are related) to be interpreted? Most scholars (Keel 1980b, p. 170; Beck 1982, p. 29; Dever 1984, p. 25; and Lemaire 1984b, p. 46, among others) agree that these two figures are the god Bes. Lemaire thinks that there is no figure here which depicts Yahweh at all, and also believes that the lyre player is merely accompanying Bes (1984b, p. 46). In fact, he does not believe that, at the end of the 8th century BC, Asherah is even considered a goddess, but rather a generic name like Baal, on the way to being personified (p. 51). Dever, however, believes not only that Asherah is a goddess, but also that she is represented by the seated lyre player, and is to be considered specifically as the consort of Yahweh (1984, p. 30).

Dever bases his identification on many parallels which he cites from around the ancient Near East, and also on his insistence that the inscription and the painted figures are meant to be interpreted together. Whether this assumption is correct or not (see the discussion in the concluding remarks below), there are some difficulties in accepting his conclusions on the basis of the parallels he brings. A closer examination of the figures is appropriate at this point. The two "Bes" figures will be discussed first, followed by an analysis of the lyre player.

### (1) *The "Bes" Figures*

"Bes" is the name usually given to a group of Egyptian dwarf gods. The most "typical" representation of Bes in Egyptian art is "frontal and squatting. He is naked apart from the lion-skin whose tail is usually visible between his legs, and he often wears a feather crown. His hands rest on his thighs and his features are normally grotesque, animal rather than human. He is usually bearded and has mane-like hair" (Wilson, p. 78). Furthermore, he is of a dwarf-like stature, often with a protruding tongue, and may have erect animal ears and on the whole a leonine appearance. It also seems acceptable for multiple figures of Bes to stand next to one another (Altenmüller 1975a, col. 721).

Whereas in Egypt Bes usually appears naked, in the East he is usually clothed in a plain or pleated kilt, sometimes of embroidered material, and frequently with a long sash (Wilson, p. 84). His body can also be covered with uzats (Horus eyes), which can degenerate into ordinary eyes, raised spots, or flat spots (Grenfell, p. 31).

Bes is occasionally depicted with breasts, or as a female (and in fact there is a female Bes, or Beset, with pendulous breasts and a pot-belly; cf. Altenmüller 1975b, col. 731). In addition, from the 7th century on, the motif of Bes suckling the Horus child becomes popular (Wilson, p. 82). He also acts as a master of animals, and appears in Phoenician art as the "vanquisher of lions and griffons" (Culican, p. 98). In fact, Bes as a master of animals in Egyptian art is fairly late, appearing in the Saite period at the earliest, and probably originates in the East (Wilson, p. 83).

Bes became popular in Egypt and the rest of the Near East during the New Kingdom period, and his popularity continued through the Roman era. He appears on ivory carvings (cf. especially the 8th century Nimrud and LB Megiddo ivories), metal bowls (cf. Barnett 1935), and Bes-shaped pottery vessels (cf. Stern 1976). In addition to full-scale representations of the god, "Bes-heads" alone were used to decorate household items such as toilet articles, scarabs, and amulets. His function appears to be mainly apotropaic, and he often appears with other gods and demi-gods (Wilson, p. 83).

It is true that there are many types of dwarf-gods in the ancient Near East, including Ptah-Sokar, Priapus, ʿEhayut, and so forth; and from the New Kingdom period onward the ancients themselves seem to confuse the different attributes of the different deities, and much borrowing occurs. But the attributes mentioned above, among others, appear to be typical of Bes in most periods.

How do the two standing figures on Pithos A from ʿAjrud fit into this framework, if at all? Beck (pp. 27-31) has presented a detailed and thorough description of the two Bes figures; however, a few further comments are in order.

At first glance, these two figures do not appear to be dwarf-like. Beck points out that the typical characteristics of a broad body, fat arms, pot-belly, and short legs that give the impression of dwarfism are lacking from the ʿAjrud figures (p. 30). However, the legs are proportionally much shorter than is normal for the rest of the body, and the heads are larger than one would normally expect them to

be; so perhaps in this rather clumsy manner the painter tried to give the impression of a dwarf figure. The broad, flat nose gives a somewhat leonine appearance, as do the roundish ears of the left-hand figure, and although the heads are hairless, there may be an indication of the typical square beard. Bes also occasionally appears bald. On one of the Nimrud plaques, Bes is bald but still wears a feather crown, as is the case here (Wilson, p. 96).

Beck points out that the feathered headdress on the left-hand Bes is more typical, and that the headdress on the other Bes figure "resembles more the base of the crown of the faience amulets than those of two dimensional Bes figures, but even on the amulets it covers the entire head" (p. 31). However, on two Achaemenid cylinder seals (Wiseman, figs 103 and 106), a Bes figure is to be seen with the same headdress as our right-hand Bes. Admittedly these seals are later than our examples, but since the iconography of Bes seems to have been established during the New Kingdom period in Egypt, and often forms of the god remained static throughout its history into the Roman period (Wilson, p. 78), the fact that our examples predate the Achaemenid ones by 200 years or so need not be worrisome. On one of these cylinder seals, not only does Bes have the same type of headdress as our right-hand example, but he is holding what is described as a lotus flower in each hand (Wiseman, fig. 103). The lotus flower in his left hand has three upright leaves, and looks similar to the ostrich-feathered headdress of the left-hand Bes on Pithos A. As the whole appearance of this Achaemenid Bes is so similar to our right-hand figure, with the same headdress, a similar kilt, the lion's tail between his legs, and even breasts, in addition to holding "sceptres" with possibly the same type of design as the other Bes' headdress, one wonders if this style of headdress was more common than previously believed.

As mentioned above, Gilula (p. 129) believes the right-hand Bes figure to be female, as it has breasts. However, the breast and nipples of Bes figures are often depicted, as we have just seen from the Achaemenid cylinder seal mentioned above (and cf. Wilson, p. 82; Keel 1980b, p. 170; and Beck, p. 30). In fact, especially from the 7th century and later, Bes is often portrayed suckling the Horus child or else is clearly bisexual (Wilson, p. 81, and Keel 1980b, p. 170). Furthermore, an even closer parallel in terms of dating to that of the ʿAjrud examples appears on an Aramaic scarab seal of

ʾAḥiṣur, from the 8th century BC (Hestrin and Dayagi-Mendels, pl. 130), which shows a bearded man with breasts, wearing a kilt, not unlike our Bes figure. He is obviously human and not leonine, but it is known that Bes sometimes appears in human guise, wearing a kilt (Wilson, p. 84), and is often confused with other superhuman beings, especially in the East (Wilson, pp. 86-7, and cf. Culican, pp. 93-6). Nevertheless, it can be seen from the above parallels that it is not justifiable to conclude that the right-hand Bes figure is female simply because of the presence of nipples.

Furthermore, Gilula has the difficulty of explaining the projections between the legs of both Bes figures. He considers them to be the male genitalia, which he believes were added later in the case of the right-hand figure. Keel (1980b, p. 170) also considers this appendage as a phallus, since he believes the scrotum is depicted as well. He further states that, as a rule, the lion's tail is longer than that of the ʿAjrud examples. The characteristic tuft of hair at the tip of the lion's tail is also missing here, but during the course of time, the convention becomes more stylized. The Bes figure on the Achaemenid cylinder seal (Wiseman, pl. 103) has a shorter tail, which appears to lack the tuft at the end. And as both Bes figures are wearing kilts, these projections probably merely indicate the tail of the lion-skin which Bes typically wears.

Moreover, Beck (pp. 27-8) believes that some of the vertical lines on the faces of the figures are meant to represent beards. Though it is possible for women to be bearded, this is rare; so if these lines are to be interpreted as beards, these two figures are probably male.

Both ʿAjrud figures are wearing kilts which, as mentioned above, is standard for Levantine representations of the god. On the chair of Sitamun, from the 18th Dynasty (Davis, p. 40, fig. 3, and pl. 33; and Baker, figs 68-73), appear figures of Bes dressed in a short patterned kilt similar to our Bes figures. In fact, Wilson states that "the closest parallels for the embroidered kilts worn by the dancing 'Bes' figures on the back of Princess Sitamun's throne are the embroidered kilts worn by Asiatics figured in Egyptian tomb paintings" (p. 84). These Egyptian examples also have less of a dwarf-like nature (although their beards extend down on to the chest), and their bodies are covered with dots. The designs on the kilts are composed of dots, but those on the Bes figures on Pithos A do not seem to make up any specific pattern. The Bes figures on Sitamun's chair are portrayed in their apotropaic function, beating

tambourines and brandishing knives to keep evil away from the young princess. Bes is often seen on furniture and other household items in this apotropaic capacity (Wilson, p. 78).

It is difficult to determine the meaning of these dots on the ʿAjrud drawings. Beck believes that they may have been a later addition, since the overlapping arms of the two figures are not dotted. Furthermore, they evidently do not portray clothing, as the space between the right arm and the body of the left-hand figure is dotted as well (Beck, p. 29). However, there may be another explanation for them.

Grenfell (p. 31) states that Bes can be "eyed over with uzats", and that these uzats, or Horus eyes, degenerate into ordinary eyes (p. 24, fig. 2), raised spots (p. 36, fig. 53: and this Bes also appears to have pronounced breasts), and flat spots (p. 29, fig. 28). She believes that there is a marked connection between Bes and the sacred eye. She further observes that the Horus eye is often placed on the reverse side of Bes-head amulets (p. 35). Keeping in mind the Bes figures on Princess Sitamun's chair, I suggest that the dots on the Bes figures on Pithos A at ʿAjrud were painted there as degenerated eyes, to represent the god in his apotropaic function. I believe a similar explanation of the dots is appropriate for the Bes figures on the chair of Princess Sitamun. The Horus eye itself was also considered a powerful deterrent to evil, and large quantities of them used as amulets have been discovered in sites throughout the ancient Near East. Therefore, to find a degenerated form of it on Bes figures and Bes amulets is not unreasonable.

However, there are a few problems with this interpretation. First, on all the known examples to date of Bes figures with dots on their bodies, the dots are found on all parts of the body. On the ʿAjrud figures, the legs are not dotted, nor are the interlocking arms and the forearms. I have no explanation for this, except that perhaps the ʿAjrud painter was aware of the convention in ancient Near Eastern art, but ignorant of all the rules. Or perhaps he simply forgot to add them, or decided they were unnecessary for some reason (but cf. Schumacher and Steuernagel, Tafel 24, and Gressmann, Tafel 8:24, who show a sherd from Megiddo, depicting a group of warriors who have dots on their torsos and nowhere else. This motif is also found on a kernos ring spout from Megiddo, depicted in Loud 1948, pl. 247:7).

Secondly, the kilts of the two ʿAjrud figures are also dotted in the same manner as the bodies. Usually, if both Bes' kilt and his body are dotted, the dots on the kilt are in a distinct pattern, to distinguish them from the dots on the body (cf. Davis, fig. 3, and Baker, figs 71-2). The kilt of the Bes which Grenfell (fig. 53) mentions is striped, and her other two dotted Bes figures (figs 2 and 28) appear to be naked (although the one in fig. 28 may have a kilt, which would then be dotted in the same manner as the body). Furthermore, Beck notes a winged Bes on an ostracon from Deir el-Medinah whose sash is covered with dots, but not his body (p. 30, and cf. Vandier d'Abbadie, pl. 81:2622, for a depiction of a winged Bes with a dotted kilt, breasts, and a headdress similar to the right-hand ʿAjrud Bes figure). Thus there is a precedent for Bes to have dots on his kilt or his body.

Lastly, albeit this may explain the dots on the Bes figures, why are they present on the lyre player? Although it may be theoretically possible that the dots are there to ward off evil from this figure as well, it seems unlikely, especially as dots on figures other than Bes are rare (but cf. the warriors on the Megiddo sherd mentioned above; some of the figures in the "procession of worshippers" on Pithos B from ʿAjrud here in fig. 3; and Davis, fig. 3, and Baker, fig. 72, where the hippopotamus goddess Theoris appears dotted, in company with two dotted Bes figures).

However, it is possible that these three figures (the two standing Bes figures and the seated lyre player) found at ʿAjrud were not even drawn by the same painter. Keel believes that the pithos was obviously not decorated in a deliberate manner, but was used rather as a sort of memorandum or sketchbook. Therefore, in his opinion, the lyre player on the right and the animals and lotus flowers on the left of the Bes group have nothing to do with them (1980b, p. 168). Beck, however, believes that the lyre player and the right-hand Bes figure were drawn by the same painter, because of similarities of style and execution (including nipples on both Bes and the lyre player), but that the left-hand Bes figure was added later by a different painter, since overlapping figures are rare in this period (p. 36). Indeed, not only does the left-hand Bes overlap the Bes figure on the right, he also overlaps the cow and calf with his right foot, and the ibex and lotus plants with his right shoulder. Therefore, Beck's conclusion is an attractive one.

Additionally, this may help to solve the problem of the dots on the lyre player. It may be that originally only the right-hand Bes figure had dots. If so, this may indicate some sort of short-sleeved garment (albeit see-through, so that the nipples and the collar-bone can be seen) with a sash or a kilt (although we are still left with the dots on the left ear and the left hand). As the dots on the left-hand Bes appear larger and more crudely drawn than the dots on the right-hand Bes, they do not appear to have been painted by the same person who painted the right-hand Bes. This therefore strengthens the argument that the left-hand Bes was painted later. Furthermore, the dots on the lyre player seem to be of the same larger type as those on the left-hand Bes, and so perhaps the later painter decided to put dots on this figure as well, when he painted his own figure, in order to make them alike (but see also the discussion below about the dots on the lyre player). Whether or not the dots are a subsequent addition, it is reasonable to assume that the lyre player and the right-hand Bes figure were drawn first, and the left-hand Bes figure was added later by someone else. Moreover, the dots on the Bes figures may help to illustrate his apotropaic character.

This group of two Bes figures and the seated lyre player Dever believes is reminiscent of an 8th century bronze bowl discovered at Nimrud, which depicts two Bes figures supporting a canopy over a goddess seated on a panelled throne (1984, p. 26, and cf. Barnett 1935, figs 6-7). He uses this bowl as support for his theory that the seated lyre player here is meant to be Asherah. But if he admits that these two figures are Bes, why would "the goddess" then be specifically Asherah? And if the drawing is meant to be a representation of the inscription, why is Bes depicted here and not Yahweh? In fact, if this bowl was a parallel for the ʿAjrud drawing, it would weaken his case for identifying the lyre player with Asherah, rather than strengthen it. For in the Nimrud example, Bes is clearly serving the goddess, by supporting the canopy over her throne, whereas if the ʿAjrud lyre player were to be associated with the Bes figures, then the lyre player would be the servant, cast in the role of playing for Bes. Why would the consort of Yahweh be accompanying a minor god such as Bes? Furthermore, I know of no instance where a major deity (such as Asherah) is subservient to a minor deity (like Bes). Even on the Phoenician bowl from Salerno (Culican, p. 95), Bes stands behind the victorious pharaonic figure (whom Culican

identifies with Baal), holding the royal fan and a captive woman. Other arguments against the identification of the lyre player with Asherah will be discussed below.

All that remains in this discussion of the Bes figures is to ask why they were painted on the pithos in the first place. Dever himself states that Bes may simply appear here in his apotropaic function (1984, p. 26). In this he is probably correct. One must bear in mind that the pithos was reconstructed from sherds discovered in the bench room, near the opening which led into the large inner courtyard. From the Middle Kingdom period onwards, Bes was considered capable of warding off such evils as snakes and scorpions, and depictions of him were found on ivory wands to perform this service (Culican, pp. 94-5, and Wilson, p. 77). I suggest that these Bes figures fulfilled a similar function, and are meant to be menacing; the placement of the pithos near the entrance to the inner courtyard, where the travellers and their animals would take their rest for the night, is reminiscent of the function of the cherubim in Gen. iii 24 and perhaps the seraphim in Isa. vi, and was meant to protect the inhabitants from all the real and imagined evils of the hostile desert surrounding them.

(2) *The Lyre Player*

The lyre player is drawn sitting on a "throne", above and to the right of the two standing Bes figures. Even if the lyre player was drawn by the same painter as the right-hand Bes figure, this positioning seems to indicate that it is not a part of the same scene, as it is the general practice in Egyptian art to place all related figures on more or less the same level (I owe this information to Mr John Ray of Cambridge University). As mentioned above, Keel does not think that this figure is a part of the same scene as the Bes figures (1980b, p. 168), in spite of Bes' association with music and dancing (Wilson, p. 80). Indeed, the lyre player is turned away from the Bes figures, which also does not seem to indicate a connection. However, this will be considered in more detail below. The discussion which follows will consider four aspects of this figure: the garments, the coiffure, the lyre, and the "throne", thus following the order in which Dever (1984) presents his argument for identifying the lyre player as "Asherah, the Consort of Yahweh".

(a) *The garments*. Dever (1984, p. 23) believes that the dots on the seated figure represent an ankle-length skirt and a shawl around the

shoulders. He cites a bronze figure of an LB seated female deity from Ugarit, and two LB II gold pendants depicting two enthroned female deities, also from Ugarit. The fact that he has not cited any Iron Age or local parallels is disturbing. Tadmor (1982a, p. 171) observes that the so-called Astarte plaques which depict standing women accompanied by symbols of Canaanite religion do not continue into the Israelite period, even though they are so common in the Late Bronze period (although some groups of bronzes survive; cf. Negbi 1974, pp. 159-72). Tadmor further observes that those plaques which are still to be found in the Iron Age (mostly in the north, through Phoenician influence) are of the more plain variety, which she believes depict ordinary human beings instead of goddesses (p. 171). In the light of this information, to base the identification of the seated lyre player with Asherah upon the evidence of three LB II Ugaritic parallels is tenuous indeed. Dever further states that the dots on one of the Ugaritic pendants are "exactly as on the ʿAjrud seated figure" (1984, p. 23). However, on the Ugaritic pendant the dots are fully contained inside the confines of the skirt, whereas with the ʿAjrud lyre player this is not the case, as the dots run outside (and parallel to) the line of the garment as well. In fact, Beck does not even consider the dots as an indication of the garment, as does Dever. As mentioned above (cf. the discussion of the dots on the Bes figures), Beck points out that the left Bes figure also has dots between his torso and right arm, which indicates that they are probably not meant as a garment pattern or even tattooing; rather, this may be evidence that they were a later addition (p. 29). Dever does not mention these dots in his account. Turning specifically to the lyre player, Beck observes that the use of the dotted line parallel to an unbroken one conforms to a pattern following the so-called "Midianite" pottery (p. 33). She cites several examples from Timna of the dotted line running parallel to the feathers of ostriches (obviously not a garment in this case, but it is interesting to note that traditionally Bes' headdress is made up of ostrich feathers, so this may support the theory that the dots serve some sort of apotropaic function), from Qurayyah in Arabia, and Megiddo Stratum IX, and points out that the first two examples are from the beginning of the Iron Age. From his excavations at Hajar Bin Ḥumeid in Arabia, van Beek observes that this type of style of dotted lines following straight lines apparently died out in Palestine in the 10th century, after much popularity in LB

II. However, it apparently continued into the 9th-8th centuries in Syria and North-West Mesopotamia, and even into the 7th century in Edom (van Beek, pp. 358-9).

Returning to the ʿAjrud lyre player, Beck states that "according to this decorative principle, the dots running along the shoulder of our musician are not an indication of a garment pattern, but rather the dotted line that follows the solid one; the same applies to the dotted line curving along the front outline of the player. If so, we are still left with the unexplained group of dots covering the lower part of the body. The partially naked body may perhaps be compared with the similarly attired figure on the Hubbard amphora..., which is unclad from the breast-line up, while the rest of her body is covered by a diaphanous garment through which the legs are visible. If this analogy is viable, the spattering of dots on the lower part of the ʿAjrud figure may also indicate a garment pattern. However, none of these possibilites seems to furnish a satisfactory explanation for the dots on the Bes figures" (pp. 33-4). Nevertheless, as seen above, there may be a separate explanation for the dots on the Bes figures: that of a degenerated eye, expressive of Bes in his apotropaic function.

Therefore, the dots on the lyre player may indicate a garment pattern, or instead they may represent a well-known artistic convention, or may have been added later. But even if the dots do represent a garment pattern, it need not necessarily be a female skirt and shawl. One must not forget that the sex of the lyre player has not yet been determined. This matter will be discussed more fully below in the section on the coiffure, but I suggest that this figure is male, perhaps a young prince.

The skirt appears to be mid-calf length, if the dots are any indication of the garment. It is difficult to tell how far above the waist the garment extends, as the lyre player's arm obstructs the top (unless the top of the garment is see-through, as on the Hubbard amphora; see above). Nevertheless, this long type of garment is common among the 8th century Nimrud ivories, often depicted as a short kilt, covered by a long shawl (Barnett 1957, pl. 3:C1, C4, C8, C10; and Mallowan, figs 440, 444-5, 493, etc.). The dots along the shoulder of the lyre player may represent the shawl, or they may be meant to portray a pectoral necklace, which is also often depicted (Mallowan, figs 431, 440, etc., and cf. Barnett 1957, pl. 8:C51, for a necklace with globular dangles). One of these Nimrud ivories

(Barnett 1935, p. 185, and 1957, pl. 3:C4) is of a man holding a lotus flower, not unlike some of those found on the ʿAjrud pithoi, and saluting. He is dressed in a short kilt, but with a long robe, reaching to his ankles. The kilt and robe are decorated with a pattern of vertical lines, but the border is dotted. Perhaps this is the same idea as the dots running along the outside of the lyre player's garment. The Nimrud figure wears a decorated collar, although he does not have a bare chest. His "conical cap" is not unlike that of the lyre player's coiffure (see below). Another parallel is that of two young lads flanking a lotus plant, who have hairstyles identical with that of the ʿAjrud figure, naked torsos and breasts, and wear short kilts which are tied at the waist and have dotted borders (Barnett 1957, pl. 3:C10, and cf. Supp. 20). Although they lack the long shawl, there are several other figures from this group of Nimrud ivories which have long Egyptian garments (cf. e.g., Barnett 1957, pl. 8:C48, and Supp. 52).

The lyre player is also vaguely similar to three captive lyrists (although these are standing) from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh (Gressmann, Tafel 68:151, and Gadd, pl. 20, and p. 176). They are wearing a long, mid-calf length garment, but without a sash, and also one which covers the chest. Although they are bearded, the coiffure is similar. One of the figures has a patterned wig of a chequerboard type of design.

As mentioned above, the depiction of nipples on the lyre player does not rule out the possibility of the figure being male (cf. the discussion and parallels mentioned above, and the Hubbard amphora). Indeed, Beck believes that the identification of the lyre player as a female can be made solely on the basis of the hairdo and the skirt (p. 31). But are the skirt and hairdo necessarily feminine? As was shown above, the dots along the shoulders could indicate a man's pectoral as easily as a women's shawl (alternatively, these dots may be intended to represent the strap which supports the lyre and is occasionally depicted; cf. the bronze stand in Catling, pl. 34, mentioned below), and the long skirt can be worn by either a male or a female (the matter of the coiffure will be taken up in the next section). Therefore, these cannot be used to determine that the lyre player is female, least of all a goddess. Dever himself admits that Negbi (1976, p. 101) has questioned whether the parallels he brings are deities or worshippers (Dever 1984, p. 23), and so the identification of the lyre player with Asherah cannot be proven by these parallels.

(b) *The coiffure.* In Dever's opinion, the dots on the head of the lyre player denote either a long wig or a coiffure of tight curls or ringlets (1984, p. 22). If this is the case, what is the purpose of the line of dots outside the unbroken line of the head? If the dots on the lower part of the body are meant to portray a garment, perhaps the dots here indicate some sort of head covering, similar to the "conical cap" on the figure of an 8th century Nimrud ivory mentioned above (Barnett 1957, pl. 3:C4), which has been identified as a free rendering of an Egyptian royal helmet (p. 140). Although less square around the face than the ʿAjrud example, this head covering appears to have a dotted design, and is not unlike the lyre player's coiffure (cf. also the covering of "beads" on Tutankhamun's wig, depicted on the back of his chair, although this is much earlier; Carter and Mace, pls 2, 62-4; Gressmann, Tafel 37:82-3; and Aldred, pl. 158). Or we may have here merely the line of dots which follow a solid line, a convention which has been discussed above. Dever further believes that this type of coiffure "obviously recalls the common 8th-7th century B.C. pillar-base 'Astarte' figurines, as well as the Phoenician style hairdo of many of the sphinxes and the 'Lady-at-the-Window' (a sacred prostitute) depicted on the 8th century B.C. ivories of Samaria, Arslan-Tash, and Nimrud" (1984, p. 23). He believes that these parallels indicate the cultic nature of this seated figure.

Whereas the hairdo on the "Astarte" pillar-base figurines is similar to that of the lyre player, it is much more curved around the face, and does not follow the line of the chin as the ʿAjrud example does. Furthermore, although the hairdos of the "Woman at the Window" ivories from Nimrud appear to have some sort of dotted design, that is not uncommon for a male coiffure either, and women's hair depicted on the ivories is usually at least shoulder-length, which is longer than that of the lyre player. A much closer parallel is that cited above (Barnett 1957, pl. 3:C10), as well as numerous other Nimrud ivories, all depicting males (Barnett 1957, pl. 1:G1; pl. 3:C1, C4, C8; pl. 46:S313; Supps 20, 39, 45, 52; and Mallowan, figs 440, 444-5, 466, 493, etc.).

Dever later cites an example of a figure similar to the lyre player on an LB bronze stand from Episkopi (mentioned above). The figure is seated on a throne similar to the one depicted at ʿAjrud, is playing a lyre, and has a similar coiffure. This figure, however, has been interpreted as a male (Dever 1984, p. 24, and cf. Barnett

1935, pl. 28, and Catling, pl. 34). Catling states that this figure may be either human or divine, and cites another similar figure, with a coiffure identical with that of the ʿAjrud figure, wearing an ankle-length garment, sitting on a stool and playing a stringed instrument (Catling, pl. 35:d, and p. 209, and Dever 1984, n. 12, p. 32). This figure also is male (and cf. another earlier example brought by Silvia Schroer in Keel and Schroer 1985, Abb. 79. Although schematic, it shows a man and woman coupling, and the man has a similar hairstyle to that of the lyre player).

A further example, albeit a century later, was discovered in Ashurbanipal's palace in Nimrud (Place, pl. 60:2, and Gadd, pl. 44, and pp. 204-5). The coiffure of the lyre player is not unlike those of the (Elamite?) prisoners, although our figure obviously lacks a beard. Contrast this with another relief from the same palace (Place, pl. 60:3), where the women have a similar hairstyle, especially around the ear, but the hair goes to the shoulders.

In fact, what we have here is a typical Egyptian-type wig or hair covering for men (I owe this information to Mr John Ray of Cambridge University). Most of the women have longer hair (at least shoulder-length), unless they have a short, boyish cut which is, in any case, unlike the coiffure of the ʿAjrud figure. When men are depicted without a wig or hair covering, their hair is shown cut close to the head and around the ears. However, when they have a head covering, the nature of the head covering can vary according to type, but the style of coiffure of the ʿAjrud lyre player is a common male wig.

(c) *The lyre.* The seated figure appears to be holding an asymmetric lyre, which Meshel has identified as the biblical *kinnôr* (1977, p. 100). Beck (1982) and Dever (1984) mention several examples of this type of lyre, which is now considered to be common in the ancient Near East. Dever presents two examples which he believes are especially instructive. The first is the LB bronze stand from Episkopi mentioned above in the discussion about the coiffure, showing on one panel a seated lyre player with a similar hairstyle to that of the ʿAjrud figure, and interpreted as a male (Dever 1984, p. 24, and cf. Barnett 1935, pl. 28, and Catling, pl. 34). As mentioned above, Catling is unsure whether the figure is human or divine (p. 206). As this figure has been identified as a male, and as Catling's figure with a similar garment as well as a similar coiffure also appears to be male (p. 209), it seems that these "especially in-

structive'' parallels help to confirm my opinion that the ʿAjrud lyre player is male (and cf. Loud 1948, pl. 76, fig. 1, which depicts a Philistine jug from Megiddo, showing a male lyre player).

The second example Dever cites is an 8th century BC pyxis from the south-east palace at Nimrud from Barnett 1935, pl. 26:1, showing a procession of musicians with a lyre player. ''They are arrayed behind a female deity who wears a coiffure and a long quilted dress similar to the ʿAjrûd lady and is also seated on a short-backed cherub throne'' (Dever 1984, p. 24). However, this piece of ivory is broken, and the whole of the deity has not been preserved, which makes it difficult to see the head or determine the sex. And although the throne depicted is a cherub-throne, it is not all that similar to the one at ʿAjrud. This throws the identification of the ʿAjrud throne as a cherub-throne into question (cf. the discussion below). Even more important, it is not the seated deity who is playing the lyre, but rather one of the worshippers in the procession. There is no depiction of a procession of worshippers on this pithos from ʿAjrud (the set of figures which has been identified as a procession of worshippers is on Pithos B; see fig. 3); therefore Dever believes that the absence of the ''usual scene featuring a military or festal procession with musicians...does suggest that the lone figure with the lyre may be either a priestess or a deity'' (1984, p. 24). This type of negative identification is hazardous. It is also a difficulty that we have few, if any, parallels of deities playing the lyre for themselves.

A better interpretation is that of Beck, who believes that there may be a connection between the lyre player and the Bes figure, and that they are a part of the same scene. We have seen that Bes is associated with music and dancing (Wilson, p. 80). Indeed, he is sometimes depicted holding a musical instrument and dancing to his own accompaniment. Beck is not aware of any scene where Bes dances to the accompaniment of someone else, but believes that ''it is possible that the painter was acquainted with scenes like those on the rock drawings and translated them into the iconographic repertoire with which he was most familiar: a lyre player—which he had seen on seals or ivory carvings (although not as part of a scene)—and dancing and playing Bes figures, which he knew from Egyptian sources'' (p. 36). However, as noted above, it is possible that the lyre player is not even a part of the same scene as the Bes figure(s), as he is on a different level and is facing in the opposite direction.

Although individual musicians are occasionally portrayed facing in the opposite direction in Egyptian paintings, they are usually a part of a general group of musicians, whose orientation as a whole is toward the main subject of the scene. Furthermore, it does not make sense that such a major goddess as the consort of Yahweh would fulfil such a subservient role as to accompany a minor god like Bes, as mentioned above. In this connection it must be asked whether or not these Bes figures are dancing. They appear to be more menacing, and are not in their typical "dancing" pose (cf. the Bes figures on Princess Sitamun's chair, Davis, fig. 3). This would strengthen the case for the view that these two Bes figures are not to be considered part of the same scene as the lyre player (and cf. Keel 1980b, p. 168). Indeed, it is possible that Bes never actually dances at all. When Bes is "dancing", he sometimes is playing a flute or beating a tambourine. "On other occasions he holds an Egyptian sign or an *uzat* eye, snakes or knives. Only occasionally when dancing does he wear a feather crown" (Wilson, p. 80). As seen above, the uzat eye has an apotropaic function. Brandishing snakes or knives may have a similar menacing effect, and flutes and especially tambourines can make loud, harsh, warning sounds. Perhaps this "dance" of Bes is meant more as a deterrent to evil spirits than as a "celebration".

Therefore, the identification of the lyre player with the goddess Asherah and the standing figure with Yahweh is far from proven. It is more reasonable to assume that the standing figure is the god Bes (see above), and the lyre player is the accompanying musician, if he is indeed to be associated with the Bes figure(s) at all. In addition, one must ask why Asherah is even expected to be the lyre player in this scene. To date, none of the written sources in which she appears which have been translated mentions her in any musical connection, and certainly not playing the lyre herself. She is more a goddess of fertility, and if she were to be portrayed, one would expect perhaps a tree of life or even a stylized tree. The iconography of the "tree of life" is far too vast a subject to consider fully here. However, a few examples are in order.

Keel (1980b, Abb. 1, and cf. Winter, Abb. 458-9) presents a cylinder seal on which a vegetation goddess is portrayed with a stylized tree behind her, representing her image. That this shows the goddess and her image is made clear by the fact that they both have the same style of branches. If a major goddess such as Asherah

were to be depicted in anthropomorphic form (which is far from proven), then perhaps it would be in a similar way to this, where both the goddess and her image are portrayed. Several other Egyptian seals depict the personification of the tree as a goddess. Winter presents many of these examples of trees as goddesses (Abb. 460-6). In fact, one can clearly see this idea in the depictions. In the first example, the goddess Nut is shown standing in front of a tree. In this case, the only way one knows that the goddess is to be equated with the tree is that the word "Nut" is written above the head of the goddess and on the trunk of the tree (Keel 1978, fig. 255, and Winter, Abb. 466). The second example is that of the goddess forming the trunk of a tree (Keel 1978, fig. 254, and Winter, Abb. 462, and cf. also Abb. 463). The third example is that of the goddess in the form of a tree, nurturing pharaoh. The only "female" attributes of the tree at all are the arm that cradles pharaoh and the breast that nurtures him; otherwise the form is totally that of a tree (Keel 1978, fig. 253, and Winter, Abb. 460, and cf. Abb. 464). The final example of this personification is that of a tree alone, with no evident sign of divinity, except that it is flanked by cherubim, whose task it is to "guard" the god (Keel 1978, fig. 190, and cf. Winter, Abb. 143, where a naked goddess is depicted with a tree flanked by two ibexes, and Abb. 144, where a tree is depicted with a naked goddess flanked by two ibexes). Another interesting depiction is found in Keel 1978 (fig. 180), who presents a picture of a tree in a vase on an altar, indicating an embodiment of the deity. See also the Canaanite ewer discovered at Lachish (T. ed-Duweir), which has an inscription mentioning "the goddess" (*ʾlt*) written directly above a stylized tree (Obermann, pp. 8-17; Gaster, pp. 49-54; Diringer, p. 130). There is also a Phoenician seal from the late 8th-early 7th century BC, which depicts a sphinx before the tree of life (Hestrin and Dayagi-Mendels, pl. 120). Furthermore, the possessive suffix is never found on a personal name, so "his asherah" in the inscription probably refers to the wooden image of the goddess (cf. e.g. Emerton 1982 and Hadley 1987).

In the light of these parallels, I believe that the goddess Asherah (or at least her image) is indeed depicted on Pithos A, but in the form of the "tree of life" flanked by two ibexes, on the other side of Pithos A from the Bes figures and lyre player (see fig. 4). It is possible that Israelite iconography, in the 8th century at least, did not allow anthropomorphic portrayals of the major gods, but rather

only of the minor ones. Therefore, Bes can be depicted on the jar, but Yahweh and his asherah cannot, except through the use of their symbols or images. In the recent excavations at Pella in Transjordan, two incense stands have been uncovered.[2] One depicts a naked goddess, who the excavators believe may be a representation of Asherah, standing on a lioness's head. The other stand bears a "stylized tree" on each of its sides. Could this indicate the wooden image of the goddess? The question is a fascinating one, but still open to conjecture. The fact that, on the ʿAjrud pithos, the drawing of the stylized tree and ibexes is placed above a portrayal of a striding lion is even more enticing, but may be mere coincidence.

(d) *The "throne"*. Dever identifies three characteristics of the stereotyped features of the sphinx- or cherub-throne known from Late Bronze-Iron Age Canaan. These are (1) lion's-paw feet (2) the panelled sides, which he believes represent the stylized feathered wings of the cherub, and (3) "the distinctive short back with a tendency toward a back-turned flair at the very top, recalling perhaps the tips of the cherub's wings" (1984, p. 24). There is usually a footstool as well, which is missing from the ʿAjrud drawings, but one can infer the presence of a footstool from the fact that the lyre player's feet seem to be floating in mid air.

Dever believes that the lyre player is either royal or divine, as the figure is seated on such a throne. Whether or not the figure is royal or divine, there is nothing to indicate (except for the inscription which may not go with the drawing, see below) that the seated figure is Asherah herself. And if the lyre player is male, then an identification with Asherah is impossible.

The "throne" seems to follow the design of chairs well known from the New Kingdom period in Egypt. "Although the Egyptian chairs have different proportions, they are similar in their paw-shaped feet (which are depicted more schematically on the ʿAjrud chair), in the scale design (which, of course, is more meticulously executed on the royal thrones) and in the outcurving back of the chair (which is less emphasized at ʿAjrud) ... The ʿAjrud chair, despite its crude appearance, follows the Egyptian model more

[2] I owe this information to a personal discussion with one of the excavators at Pella, Mr Timothy Potts of Christ Church, Oxford. I am grateful to him for his willingness to discuss the subject with me. I wish also to thank Dr John Day of Oxford for introducing me to Mr Potts and discussing the subject with him, and Dr G. I. Davies of Cambridge who alerted me to the finds at Pella.

closely than the Mesopotamian'' (Beck, p. 35, and cf. Baker 1966 and Metzger 1985 for many examples of chairs and thrones). However, lyre players in Egypt are usually represented either standing or sitting on the ground, whereas they appear seated on a chair and fully dressed on Western Asian seals and ivory carvings (Beck, p. 34, and cf. Porada 1956, Buchner and Boardman 1966, and Avigad 1978). Therefore, it would appear that what we have here is the work of a local artist who is familiar with the general conventions of the ancient Near East, but who is not concerned with strict rules.

Baker has written a fine study of the furniture of the Near East. He cites several examples which parallel the ʿAjrud chair. Already mentioned above is the chair of Princess Sitamun from the 18th Dynasty (Baker, colour plate 4b). Although this belonged to a princess, note that it is considered a ''chair'', not a throne. Yet it has lion's-paw feet, panelled sides (although in this instance panelled with Bes figures, and not with a scale pattern), and a sloping back. Many of the New Kingdom and later Egyptian chairs had sloping backs, with upright supports as well, which are missing on the ʿAjrud chair. Dever also suggests that there is an ''enigmatic protuberance'' near the lyre player's right knee, which may or may not be the head of a lion (1984, p. 24). But if this is so, one expects a similar protuberance on the other side of the chair as well, which is lacking. Princess Sitamun's chair has a protruding head of a woman on each side of the chair at this same position. Although this chair is 400 years earlier than the ʿAjrud one, the similarities are striking. Therefore, it is possible that the ʿAjrud ''throne'' is not really a throne, but an ordinary chair, which may or may not have been stylized after the sphinx thrones. The golden throne of Tutankhamun is another interesting example (Baker, colour plate 6). Like Sitamun's chair, it has lion's-paw feet, a lion's head at the knee, a back support, and sides made in the shape of winged serpents, but the scene on the back of the throne shows the king sitting on an ordinary chair of a similar design, but without the sides and lion's heads at the end of either side of the seat. Furthermore, in a banquet scene (Baker, colour plate 10a), there are many people, perhaps nobles, who are sitting in similar chairs without the panelled sides.

Another excellent study of kings' and gods' thrones of the ancient Near East has been presented in 2 volumes by Metzger. He cites an additional chair of Sitamun that is an even closer parallel to the

ʿAjrud example, as it has a scale design on the sides instead of the Bes figures (Tafel 32, Abb. 229). In addition, the chair is used with a low footstool. The similarities are indeed striking, despite the difference in the dates. Therefore, the closest stylistic parallels for the ʿAjrud "throne" are those of a chair of a princess, and not a goddess or even a king.

### C. *Concluding Remarks*

In conclusion, it appears that the inscription over the heads of the Bes figures does not provide a commentary for the scene. It would be strange to have the drawing overlap the picture if they were meant to complement each other. Furthermore, there are three figures, but only two are mentioned in the inscription. Admittedly, if the second Bes figure was added later, one would have two figures to go with the two mentioned in the inscription. But it is clear that we here have a representation of Bes, and not of Yahweh, and it has not been proven that the lyre player is a part of the scene, as he is drawn above the other two figures and facing away. Additionally, as seen above, Asherah is nowhere else associated with music, and is unlikely to be serving a minor god such as Bes. Moreover, since the possessive suffix has never yet been found on a personal name (cf. e.g. Emerton 1982 and Hadley 1987), the inscription probably refers to the wooden image of the goddess. And as the lyre player is male, identification with the goddess is impossible in any case. Therefore, while the inscriptions refer to major deities, the drawings portray minor gods.

Furthermore, the pithoi are covered with all sorts of inscriptions and drawings, which are evidently the work of many different people. This has led Lemaire to believe that the site was a school, and the pithoi were used as "blackboards"; one for the teacher, the other for the pupils (1981, p. 30). He believes that the "bench room", with the benches along the walls, was ideally suited to this purpose.

This leads us to wonder what sort of site Kuntillet ʿAjrud was. It appears to be a caravanserai, where travellers would stop and seek shelter. Some would leave inscriptions, on either the pithoi or the walls, and others may have simply written the alphabet if that was all they knew. Or perhaps they just "left their mark", as shown on the drawings of Pithos A. These travellers may have been herds-

men, as there are many fertility motifs (e.g. tree of life, cow and calf, ibexes and gazelles). At any rate, the site need not be intended as a religious centre or shrine.

Lastly, the pithoi would be placed near the entrance to the building (as shown by their position when excavated). The Bes figures drawn there could be seen as "guarding" those that were inside from harm as they rested during their perilous journey.

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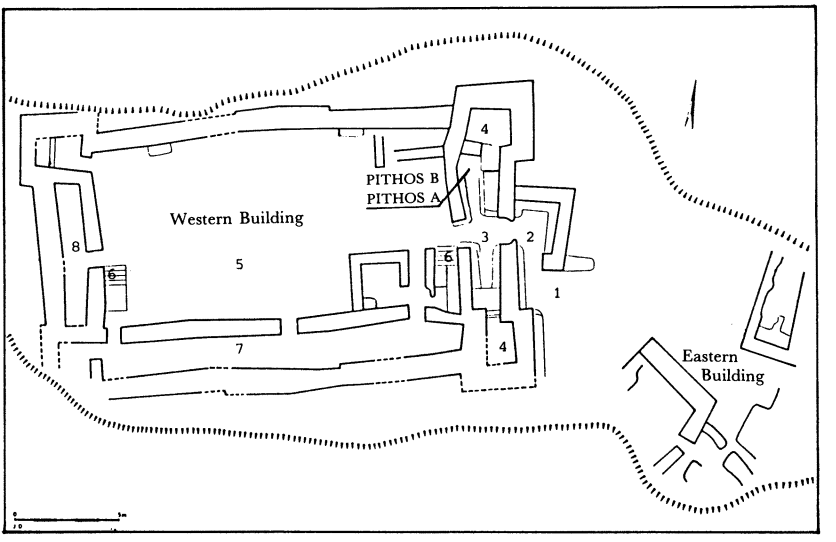


Fig. 1: A plan of the site showing the surviving buildings and where the pithoi were discovered: (1) entrance "court" (2) entry-way (3) bench room (4) depositories (5) inner courtyard (6) steps (7) south storeroom (8) west storeroom; *apud* Beck 1982 and Meshel 1978a.

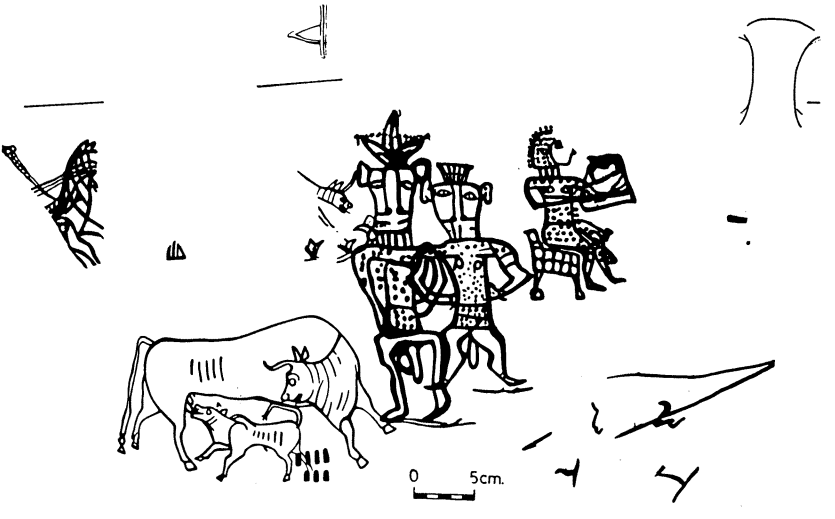


Fig. 2: Pithos A. The two Bes figures and lyre player, and their relation to some of the other drawings on the pithos. Unfortunately, only that part of inscription no. 1 which intersects the headdress of the left-hand Bes figure is reproduced here; *apud* Beck 1982.

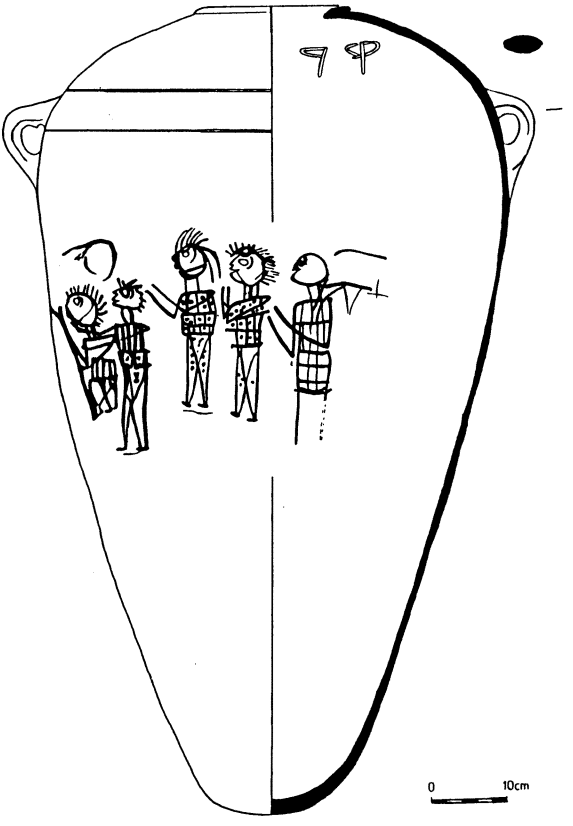


Fig. 3: Pithos B. General view, showing the procession of worshippers; *apud* Beck 1982.

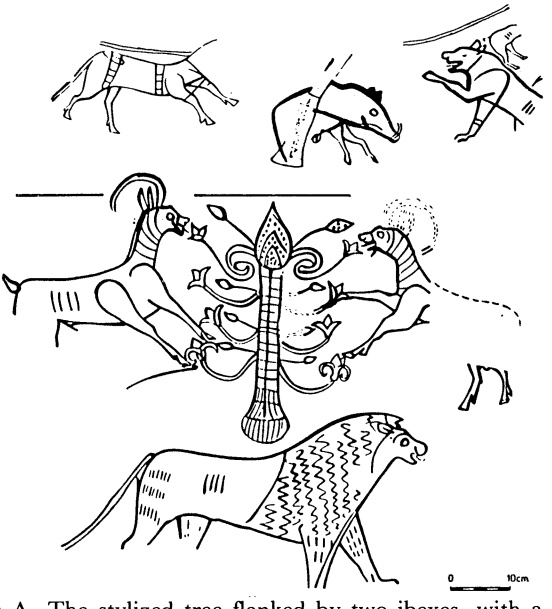


Fig. 4: Pithos A. The stylized tree flanked by two ibexes, with a striding lion beneath. Four other animal figures are shown along the shoulder of the vessel; *apud* Beck 1982.