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A NOTE ON SOME INSCRIPTIONS AND DRAWINGS FROM KUNTILLET 'AJRUD

B. A. MASTIN

ABSTRACT

M. Dijkstra's theory that the inscriptions and drawings on pithoi A and B at Kuntillet 'Ajrud were not composed until after the pithoi had been broken is not supported by photographs of the reconstructed portions of these pithoi, which show that both inscriptions and drawings were present before the breaks which are visible in the photographs were made.

The purpose of this note is to examine a theory about the inscriptions and drawings on pithoi A and B at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Dijkstra (2001, 26–27) points out that the pithoi were not intact when they were discovered, and he thinks it likely that, 'after the storage jars broke and fell into disuse', 'large sherds' from them 'were used as "rough paper"' by scribes who worked at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. He says that 'fragments of such rough drafts belonging to other jars have also been found'. He observes that 'large pieces of both pithoi [A and B] are densely and, as it seems, randomly filled with texts and drawings from different hands in different-coloured ink. . . . Some drawings were made by skilled and others by less skilled artisans, but almost without exception the script of the inscriptions is of skilled quality'. He therefore considers that the inscriptions were composed by professional scribes who had official duties at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. He concludes that 'these texts and drawings were probably "doodles", never meant to be seen or read by strange eyes, randomly scribbled by bored clerks who served' there. He adds, 'even a skilled scribe has to test a freshly pointed writing stylus every now and then. For that reason, he might have composed a letterhead, or have copied one from a . . . royal missive. He may also quickly spell out the alphabet in writing or scribble a few household words such as "barley" and so on'.

Until the finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrud have been published in full it will not be possible to discuss the 'fragments of such rough drafts belonging to other jars', but photographs of reconstructed portions of pithoi A and B which show where the pithoi have been broken do not support Dijkstra's hypothesis. The inscription on pithos A which speaks of 'Yahweh of Samaria' (Davies 1991, 81 [§8.017.1–2], cf. Davies 2004, 233; Renz 1995a, 61 [KAgr(9):8.1–2]) can best be studied in illustrations published by Ahituv (1992, 154, 155). Line 1 is written on at least six fragments of the pithos, one of which is not included in the photographs. Most of line 2 is on a fragment which contains part of line 1, but the last four letters are on yet another fragment, so that the complete inscription is on at least seven fragments. Five of the inscriptions on pithos B (Davies 1991, 81 [§§8.019–021] and Davies 2004, 11 [§§8.024–025], cf. 233; Renz 1995a, 62–63 [KAgr(9):9.1–14]) can be studied in photographs published by Meshel (1978, illustration 11) and Ahituv (1992, 157). There is a drawing of these texts in Lemaire (1981, 27, Fig. 11), and this is reproduced by Renz (1995b, Tafel IV.1). The drawings in Chase (1982, 64, Figs. 1 and 2), reproduced by Renz (1995b, Tafel IV.3, 4), should be consulted for line 3 of the longest of these inscriptions. In the inscription which mentions 'Yahweh of Teman', the first letter in line 2 is written across a break in the pithos, while the ends of lines 1–6 and from line 7 to the conclusion of the inscription are on another piece or pieces of the pithos which do not appear in the photograph. The first abecedary crosses two breaks in the pithos, the second crosses one break, and the third crosses one break and apparently continues onto a fragment which is

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not included in the photograph. The fifth inscription crosses two breaks. This section of the pithos has been reconstructed from six fragments. Each fragment contains a part or parts of one or more of these five inscriptions, and no fragment contains a complete inscription. Finally, a further inscription on pithos B (Davies 1991, 81 [§8.022], cf. Davies 2004, 233; Renz 1995a, 64 [KAgr(9):10.1]) is on four fragments (Beck 1982, Pl. 6). Thus the inscriptions were written before the breaks which are visible in the photographs were made.

With the exception of a potsherd on which a boar has been drawn (Beck 1982, Pl. 9.2), the available evidence points to an identical conclusion about the drawings. Thus, for example, on pithos A the drawing of the lyre player (Beck 1982, Pls. 5.1 and 2) extends beyond the fragment which is illustrated, while nine fragments contain parts of the two Bes figures (Beck 1982, Pl. 5.2). The other photographs of drawings on pithos A (Beck 1982, Pls. 1.1, 2, 3, 4) show similar breaks. On pithos B, the unfinished drawing of a cow is on seven fragments (Beck 1982, Pl. 1.2) and the procession of worshippers (Beck 1982, Pl. 6) is on at least ten. Thus the drawings, like the inscriptions, were made before the pithoi were broken into the fragments which can be seen in the photographs. For the sake of completeness it should be added that the seated figure drawn on a potsherd which did not form part of either pithos (Beck 1982, Pl. 16) has been reconstructed from at least five fragments.

If other fragments of pottery which contain complete inscriptions or drawings have been found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, such data might support Dijkstra's hypothesis. A decision cannot be reached until this material has been published in full. But Dijkstra has not succeeded in explaining the origin of the inscriptions and drawings on pithoi A and B which have been reviewed in this note.

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