

A beer jug with a female head attached

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In 1979, during the third excavation campaign on the summit of the main tell, at the western edge of Field I, a spouted jug with a plastic decoration of a well preserved female head has been discovered (locus nr. GE8/24, object nr. 89/79; fig. 78). The jug is kept in the Archaeology Museum of the University of Jordan in Amman. It has been previously published by the excavator (Yassine 1988: pl. XII,1), but in a very modest way which does not do justice to this exceptional artefact. Hence it shall be presented here in detail again.



Fig. 78. 'Astarte' jug found at Tell el-Mazar

The jug was found on a stone pavement outside the main building 500 of Stratum V (IA IIC, 8th-7th century B.C.). There are no other finds recorded in context with it, but typologically the jug (rim, ridged neck, decanter type, decoration; cf. Amiran 1969: p. 294-299) corresponds to the find spot's chronology. After restoration, the jug displays a height of 22 cm, a maximum diameter of 13.5 cm and a rim diameter of 4.8 cm. Its body is bag-shaped with a short flat ring-base. The strainer-spout is broken off, but its outline and some perforated holes in the body are still visible. The scars of handle attachment indicate that, to the left, a short loop handle was placed on the upper part of the body; the jug had only one handle. The cylindrical neck shows a ridge on its upper part and ends in a slightly flaring folded rim. The wheel-made jug is a

hybrid with a decanter-type body, a large mouth, a beer jug spout and an amphoriskoi-type handle. It is of red burnished ware with a buff slip or self slip and decorated with two groups of black lines, with traces of white between the dark lines at the bottom, characteristic for Ammonite pottery of IA IIC. Between the lip and the ridge traces of another black line are visible. The shoulder of the jug is decorated with a wavy black line (5-7 mm) running from the base of the neck to the shoulder's edge. In front of the applied head the line runs straight along the shoulder.



Fig. 79 Detail of the jug, with the female head

The head fixed above the remaining outlines of the spout (fig. 79) is mould-made and measures around 2.9 cm (height) and 2.7 cm (width at the base). During the joining procedure a small surplus of clay was created, especially on the upper back of the head, which gives the impression of a headdress. Yet the IA II female terracotta heads of the same site and area (Tall as-Sa'idiyeh, Deir 'Alla) show that headdresses normally rise from two or more horizontal bands marked across the forehead (cf. Amr 1980: fig. 56.57.59). The long loose hair is parted down the middle and slips behind the ears to the shoulders; no veil and no curled side-locks or plaids (cf. e.g. Tubb 1996: fig. 22) are visible; in order to attach the moulded head to the jug the falling hair was squeezed into two ridges which now support the figurine's neckless face on either side. The hair was painted in black. As on most of the female figurines from Transjordan the ears are oversized (Dornemann 1983: p. 134) and placed too high. There are no earrings. The inner corners of the eyes are rounded and the eyes' tails taper off in two parallel lines; the pupils are indicated by dark paint; a narrow ridge depicts the lids. The figurine has a distinctive nose

with quite wide nostrils and a gently curved mouth with full lips. The face is almost perfectly round; the distance between the ears and between chin to hair line is identical. The chin is slightly pointed. Starting from the nose the eyebrows are rendered by a prominent curved line running over the upper eyelid and again downwards to the temple. Traces of paint on IA terracotta figurines are attested also elsewhere in Transjordan (cf. Amr 1980: passim; Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989: fig. 126; Daviau 2002: fig. 2.28:1; Herr/Clark 2010: fig. 16), but to date the decorated beer jug from Tell Mazar with the well preserved female head applied is unique. However, the rims of an anthropomorphic juglet and possibly an anthropomorphic chalice have recently been discovered in Tall al-Umayri (Herr/Clark 2010: p. 63-64; D. Clark 2011 pers. comm.). Further close parallels are an anthropomorphic IA II beer jug in the Dayan Collection of the Israel Museum (Ornan 1986: fig. 9) as well as Cypro-Classical jugs/pitchers with a figure sitting or standing on their shoulder (Nielsen 1992: fig. 52-54; Caubet 1998: fig. 691-694; Karageorghis 2000: fig. 167-168).

Faces of the same mould as the one used for the Tell Mazar jug head have not been found to date. But the hairstyle compares to a mould and a mould fragment found in Tomb F at the Amman Citadel and a mould fragment discovered in Field A in Tall al-Umayri (Dornemann 1983: fig. 88.2; cf. 88.1; Dabrowski 2000: fig. 9.6).

Considerations on the character – human or divine – of the woman represented on the Tell Mazar jug are tightly linked to the question of the jug's function, all the more as no additional signs like a diadem/adornment or another attribute allow a definite classification of the figurine's status. As being formed independently and then attached to a larger object, the Tell Mazar relief can be compared to protomes attached to model shrines, stands and altars. Moreover, one of the above mentioned figures standing on the shoulder of a Cypriote pitcher represent Hermes who is distinguishable by his *kerykeion*. Forming part of a local cult (Nielsen 1992: fig. 54), the Hermes pitcher was probably used for libations. The Tell Mazar beer jug

was found on a paved floor at the entrance to a domestic area – may we conclude that it had a function in a domestic cult? In Juda, in the early 6th century B.C., Jer. 7:18, 44:19 refer polemically to family offerings and libations for the “Queen of Heaven” as well as to cakes marked with her image. The connection of cult and image in the case of the Hermes pitcher as well as in Jer. 44 is crucial for the understanding of the Mazar jug. A goddess on a vessel designed to contain a luxury beverage like beer or wine would in the first place have been associated to libation. But who is “she”? For the Iron Age, apart from the Hathor-Isis type “Lady of Byblos” (Cornelius 2008), Ashtart is the only Levantine goddess being clearly identified by name on an inscribed statue; by her gesture, she is shown as a blessing goddess (Bonnet 1996: pl. X). From a historical point of view, one may assume that the idea of blessing connected to the goddess Ashtart was ever-present not only in IA Phoenicia and its colonies as well as in Israel/Juda (Ashtoret < *Ashteret), but also, in its *interpretatio ammonitica*, in Ancient Ammon. Without distinctive attributes, the Tell Mazar figurine is displayed “just like a woman”; but by context (find spot, beer jug used for libations) she *can* be regarded as Ashtart/Astarte. Based on what we currently know, a goddess is epigraphically attested in Ancient Ammon not before the second century AD, when the divine Asteria, THEA ACTEPIA – with a star above her head – occurs on Roman coin reverses from Philadelphia-Amman (Spijkerman 1978: pl. 56-57). It is certainly not by chance that in the late name Asteria the older Ashtart/Astarte can be heard.

Further studies on the typology, function and identification of the IA II female terracotta figurines found in Jordan will be part of the Franco-German Figurines Project (FGFP). This project initiated by the present author, Regine Hunziker-Rodewald (University of Strasbourg, France), and Astrid Nunn (University of Würzburg, Germany) is scheduled for 2012-2015. Its results will be available as a database and a book.