

## A Middle Bronze Age Model Shrine or Granary from the Ḥawrān: Evidence for Cult Practice in Eastern Jordan

### Introduction

The ceramic vessel to be discussed in this paper was recovered during excavations carried out as part of "The University of Sydney Hauran Project", the work of which is focused on Wādī al-‘Āqib (al-‘Ajib) in the Jordanian sector of the southern Ḥawrān (FIG. 1) (Betts *et al.* 1995: 149-168; 1996: 27-39; Eames 2001a: 239-246; 2001b: 173-180; 2001c). The Wādī al-‘Āqib is one of the main wadis of the Ḥawrān, draining off the south western slopes of Jabal ad-Drūz in southern Syria (FIG. 2). It crosses the border into northern Jordan a few kilometres west of the village of Umm al-Quṭṭayn, eventually draining into the mudflats west of Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt. It is situated in a semi-arid or marginal steppic region that receives between 200-250mm annual precipitation, and experiences seasonal flooding from heavy rainfall and snow-melt higher up the mountain. In the upper reaches, close to the Syrian border, wadi bed is fairly shallow and has a narrow flood plain suitable for agriculture.

In 1994, in conjunction with a major season of excavation at the fortified Middle Bronze Age site of Rukays (Rukeis), intensive survey of the surrounding environs in the upper reaches of Wādī al-‘Āqib was carried out under the direction of Dr. Alison Betts (FIG. 3) (Betts *et al.* 1995: 149-168, Figs. 1a and 1b; 1996: 27-39). One of the primary aims of the survey was to examine Middle Bronze Age settlement in the region and to identify sites for further investigation. During the second major excavation season at Rukays in 1995/6, two of the 1994 survey sites (Sites 38 and 42) were chosen for excavation (Eames 2001a: 239-246; 2001b: 173-180; 2001c: 107-118). It was during the excavation of Site 38 that the ceramic vessel to be discussed here was found.

### Site 38

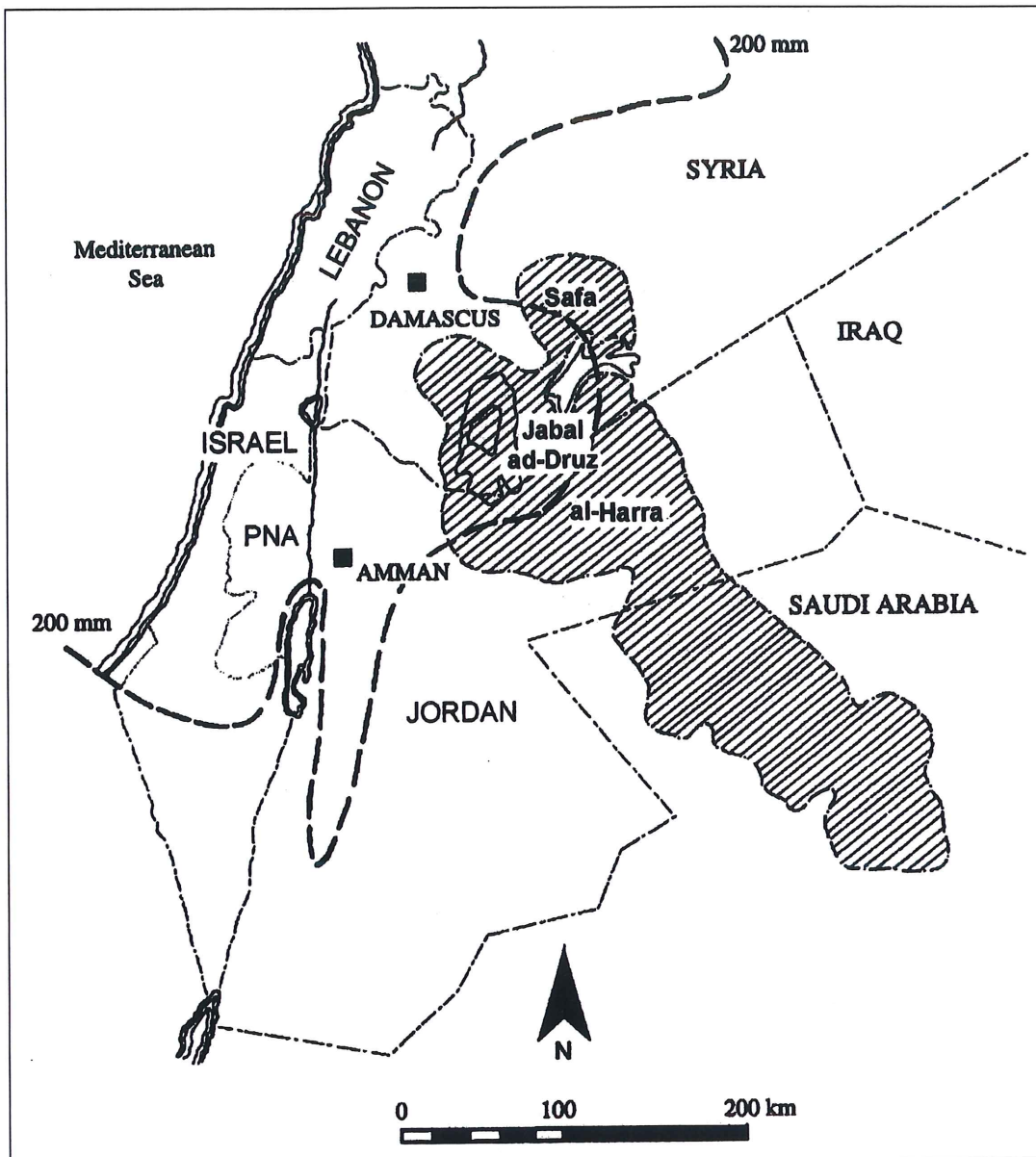
#### *Stratigraphy and Chronology*

Site 38 is situated approximately 300m north west of Rukays, on a rise on the northwestern side of Wādī al-‘Āqib

(FIG. 3). The site was chosen for further investigation on the basis of the results of the surface survey and sounding conducted in 1994, its location in relation to the wadi, its proximity to a nearby cistern and the visible architectural remains on the surface (Betts *et al.* 1996: 30). The site consists of a roughly rectangular enclosure wall with long rectangular internal structures. A small trench (Trench 1) measuring 4.5 x 3.5m was opened inside one of the structures on the north east side of the site. The trench was bounded by walls on the northern, southern and eastern sides (FIG. 4). It was excavated at its deepest point to a depth of approximately 1.20m where a sterile deposit was reached. Excavation revealed the basalt walls of the structure preserved to a height of about 1m and the existence of four possible phases (FIG. 5, TABLE 1). The latest phase occurred just below the surface and consisted of a thick deposit of rock tumble and collapse (Phase III). In this deposit a substantial amount of ceramic fragments was found, the largest proportion of which was represented by various types of jars. The phase below this, during which time the walls were probably built, was characterised by several deposits of occupation debris (Phase II). These sat above compacted deposits or possible floor levels (Phase Ib), which undulate and while missing in some places, appeared to abut all three walls. The vessel under discussion, belongs to this phase. Below this deposit was evidence of an earlier episode of activity (Phase Ia) characterised by occupation debris and pits cut into the sterile earth.

### The Ceramics

According to the ceramic analysis, the pottery from Site 38 dates mainly to the Middle Bronze Age, and in particular the Middle Bronze IIC period (Schroder 1997: 147-148, 168, Fig. 38). This, and the depth of deposit, indicates that the length of occupation at the site was relatively short. Some activity seems to have taken place at the site before the walls of the building that was excavated were constructed. On the basis of the ceramics recovered,



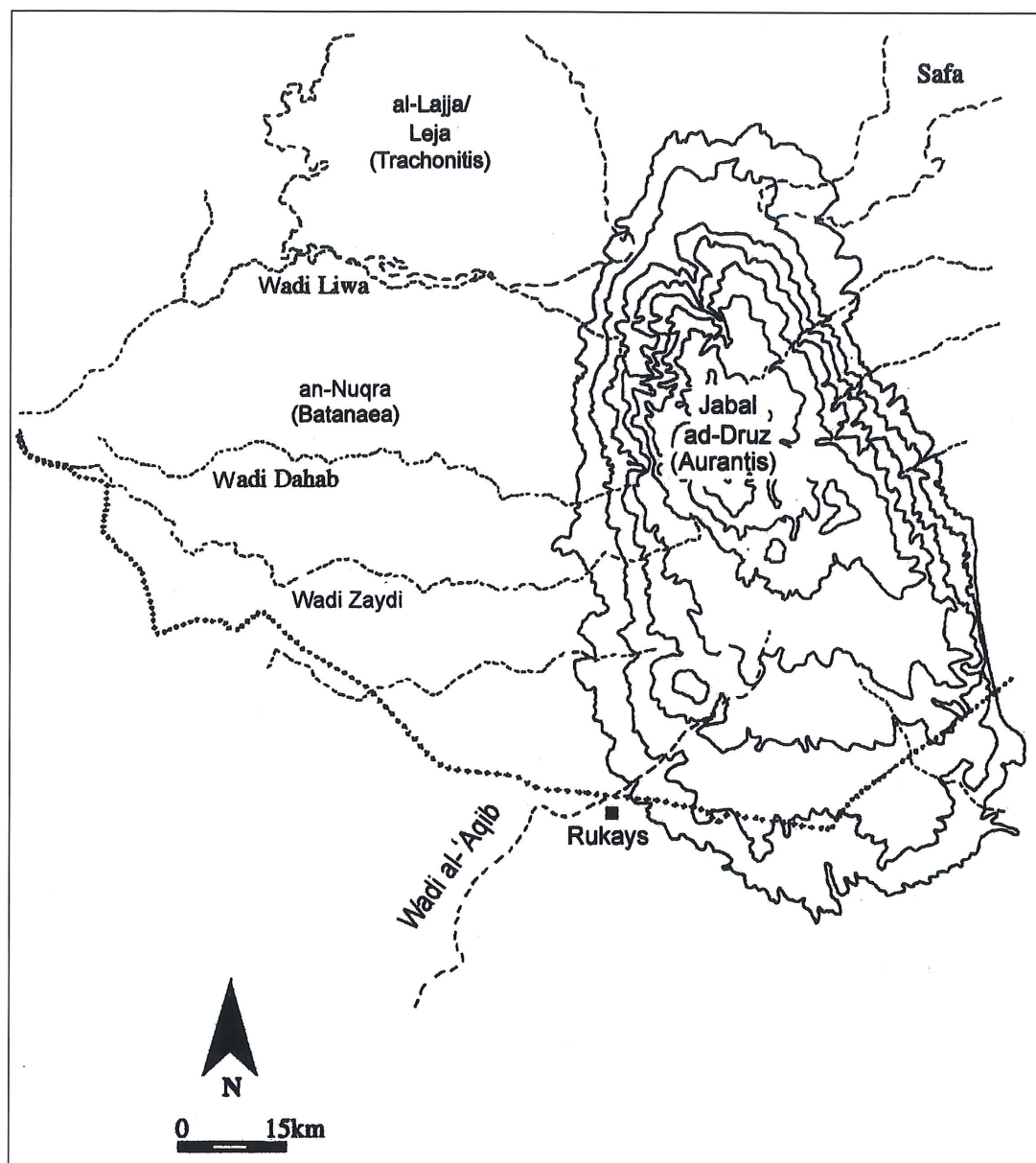
1. Map of the Levant showing the location of the Hawran (S. Eames).

this activity may belong to the Middle Bronze IIA/B period. The next phase, during which time the walls were constructed, is dated to the Middle Bronze IIC. This represents the main period of occupation. The occurrence of sherds dating to the Late Bronze Age in upper levels indicates there may have been some use of the site during this period, the nature of which remains uncertain (Schroder 1997: 172). The site appears to have been abandoned during this period although the presence of ceramics in the stone collapse suggests that vessels such as storage jars and other ceramic wares were left *in situ*. While the ceramic sample was small, the majority of forms retrieved during the excavation were fine jars and storage jars, with storage bowls being the next most common (FIG. 6) (Schroder 1997 vol. 1: 94-95, 147-148, vol. II:

Figs. 12, 13).

#### Botanical Remains

The archaeobotanical samples taken from Site 38 were quite small (Eames 2001a: 244, Table 2). While interpretation of the results of their analysis is therefore quite limited, some general conclusions can be made. The remains from Site 38 seem to indicate that barley (*hordeum*) was the most common cereal, which may be due to its ability to grow more successfully in arid areas. This was probably grown both as the main staple of the inhabitants of Site 38 and as animal fodder. Only three examples of wheat (*triticum*) were identified. Pulses, represented by lentils, and several examples of grape pips are present as well as several weed species (Wilcox, pers. comm.).



2. Map of the Ḥawrān showing the location of the Wādī al-'Āqib (S. Eames).

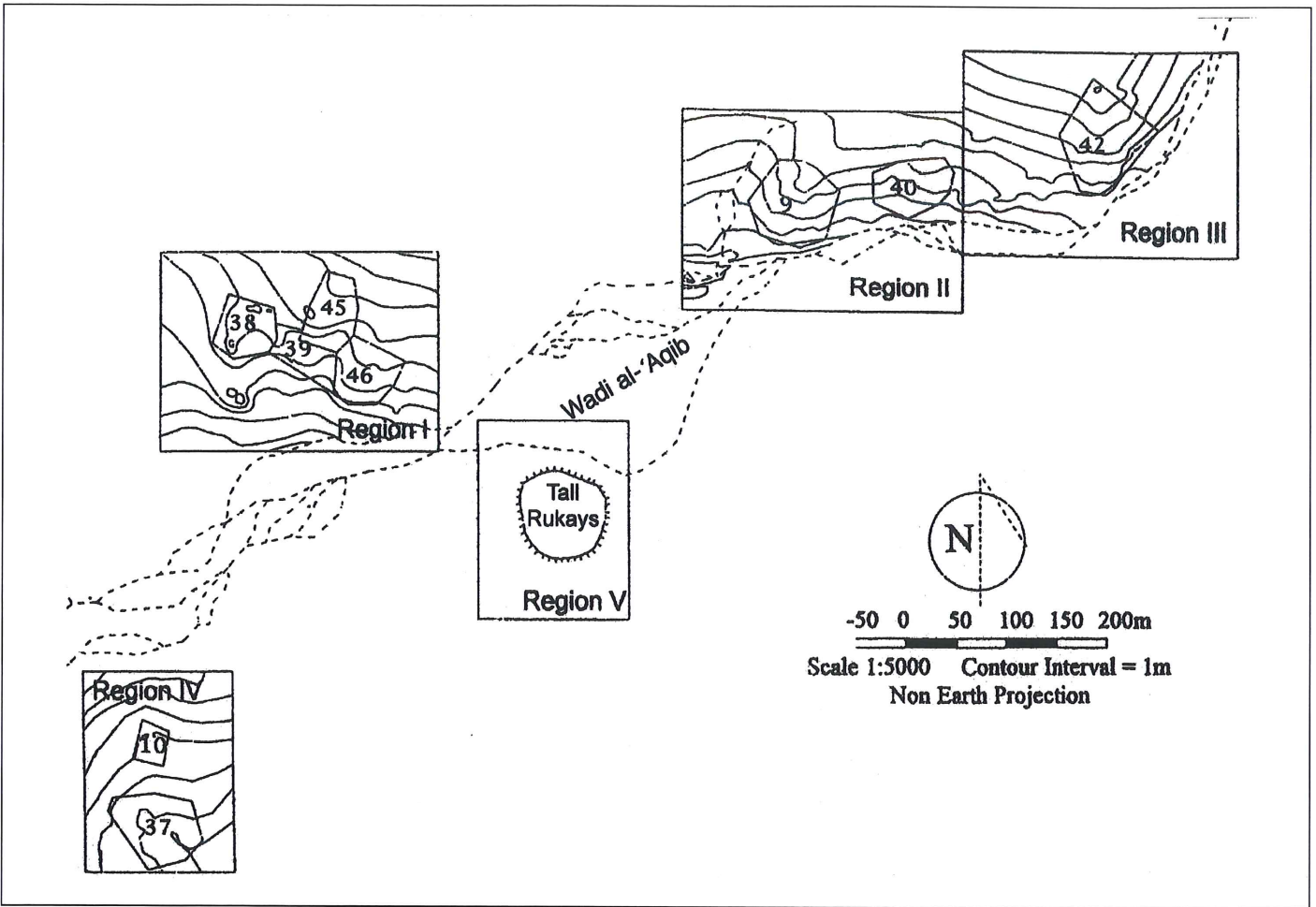
### Faunal Remains

Analysis was carried out on small number of samples of faunal remains from the excavations at Site 38 (Eames 2001a: 244, Table 3). The analysis of the data was undertaken according to standards described in other publications (Bourke *et al.* 1994: 122-123). While it was difficult to demonstrate absolute answers concerning the faunal remains, largely due to the small samples and low identification rates, some tentative conclusions could be drawn (Mairs, pers. comm.) Of the identifiable bones, sheep and goat (*Ovicaprine*) are found almost exclusively at Site 38, with both immature and mature examples being equally represented. The predominance of sheep and goat appears to suggest, not surprisingly, that these animals were the

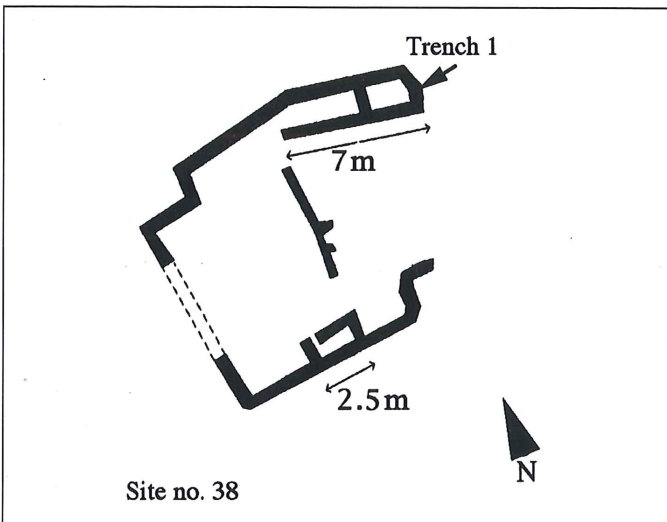
focus of local pastoral activities. The lack of variety of species present at this site may be a result of the small sample size.

### Summary

Due to the limited nature of the excavation, a clear indication of the function of Site 38 is difficult to determine. The ceramics, however, particularly the high number of storage jars, in conjunction with the botanical and faunal remains, ground stone artefacts, including saddle quern fragments, grinding and rubbing stones and the site's close proximity to the wadi and associated field systems, suggest the site probably represents a small farmstead. The evidence from the area excavated indicates that this



3. Survey map of the upper Wādi al-‘Āqib showing the location of Middle Bronze Age sites in the vicinity of Rukays (R. Ackland).



4. Plan of the visible architectural remains from Site 38 showing the location of Trench 1 (D. Young and R. Ackland).

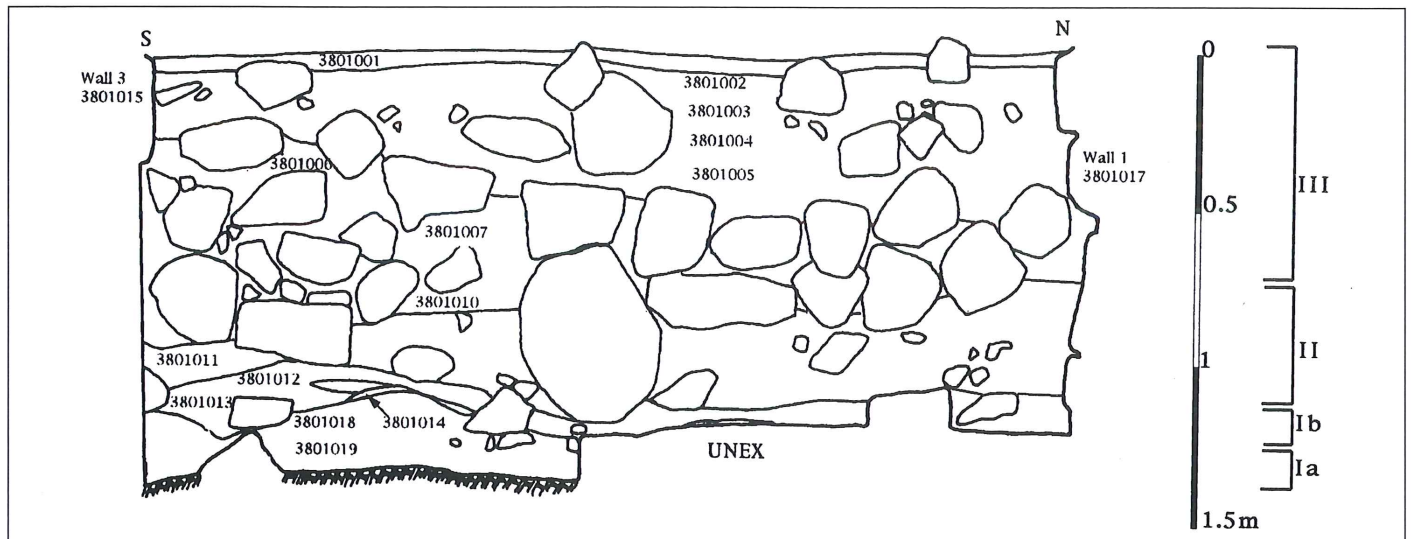
part of Site 38 may have been a storage area, perhaps for water or local agro/pastoral produce.

**Description of the Vessel from Site 38**

The vessel (inv. 1171) from Site 38 was found against the west section in a floor deposit belonging to Phase Ib (3801014) (FIG. 5). It is cylindrical in shape, tapering towards the bottom with a flat base and a beehive top or roof with a raised, rounded knob (FIGS. 7, 8, 9). At the apex the model is approximately 21cm high and has a maximum width on the body of about 8cm. Towards the top of the vessel there is an oval shaped opening or doorway with two raised, pierced protrusions on the left hand side, which probably would have been mirrored on the right, keeping a ceramic door in place (FIG. 8). It is made of a fairly finely levigated clay with small, medium and some large inclusions of fine chert, basalt and lime. It is fired brown throughout (Munsell 7.5YR 5/4) and is self slipped. This fabric is used for a number of ceramic types from Rukays and sites in the vicinity, but most commonly for storage vessels (Schroder 1997).

**Discussion and Comparisons**

Comparative examples for the vessel from Site 38 come



5. Site 38, Trench 1, West Section (S. Eames).

**TABLE 1.** Relative chronology of the Middle Bronze Age sequence at Site 38 (after Schroder 1997: 168, Fig. 38).

Phase	Archaeological Period
1a	MB IIB
1b	MB IIC
II	later MB IIC
III	later MB IIC/LB

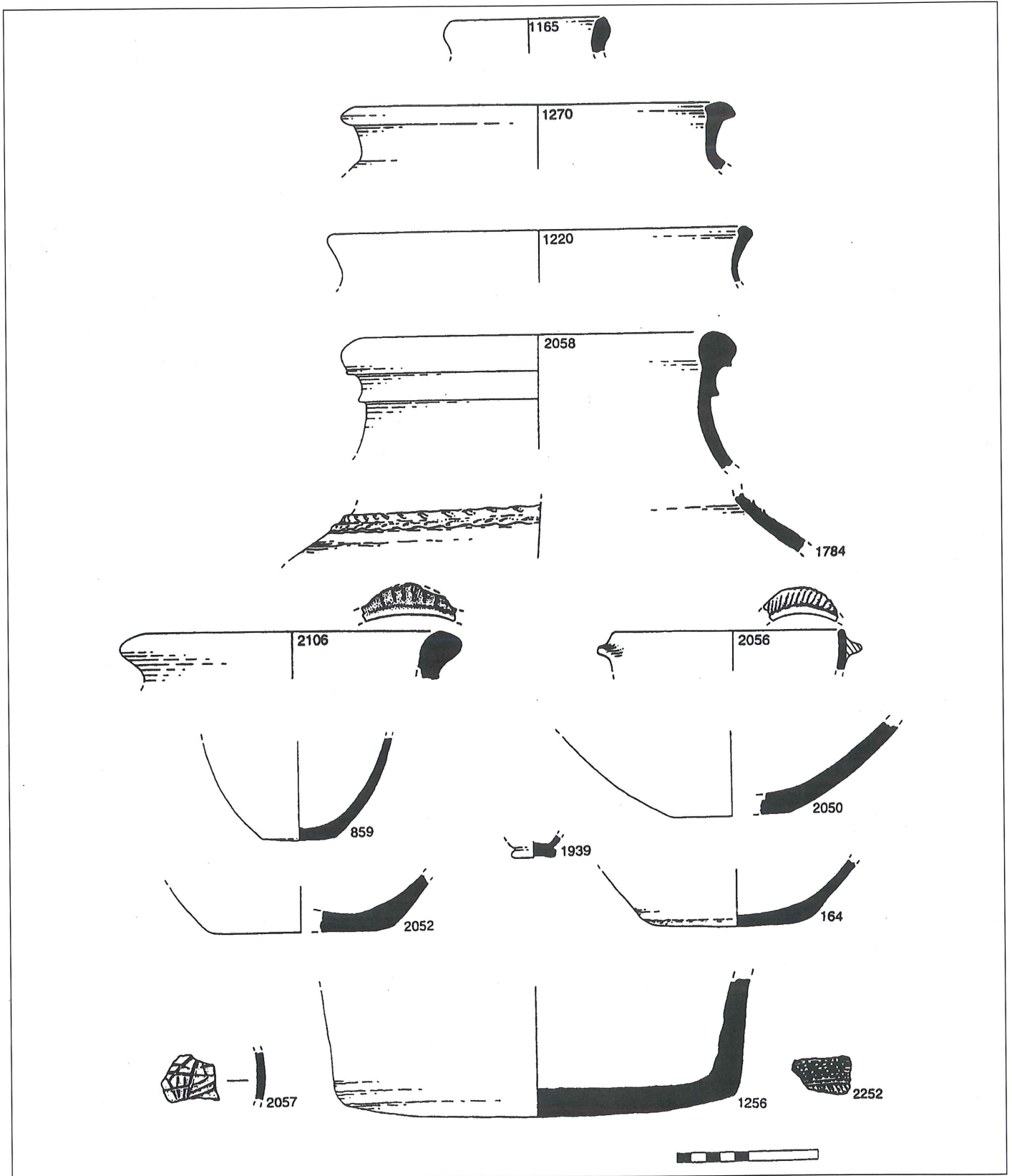
from a group of vessels from Egypt, collectively known as ‘model granaries’ (Tooley 1995: 36-38, Figs. 34, 35). They are miniature representations of structures used for the storage of grain at Egyptian estates and houses and first appear in First Dynasty tombs where they can be made of both pottery and stone. They can represent single structures or groups of silos. They come in several shapes and can be straight-sided with domed tops and model windows incised on the side at two levels for the extraction of grain. Others are dome-shaped with conical stoppers to plug an opening on the top. From the Fourth Dynasty to the New Kingdom, domed models are most often made in pottery. The earlier examples stylistically resemble their stone counterparts. Those from the Second Intermediate Period and the Eighteenth Dynasty are made from up-turned ceramic jars with a window or door on the front and are sometimes referred to as beehive pots due to their domed shape. Despite the differences in material and style, model granaries had a single function (Tooley 1995: 8-10). They were part of the furniture, usually in miniature form, placed in the tomb of the deceased to provide all that was needed in the after life. As such, they performed a cultic function associated with burial practices.

An example of a ‘model granary’ with similarities to that of the vessel from Site 38 comes from Abydos and

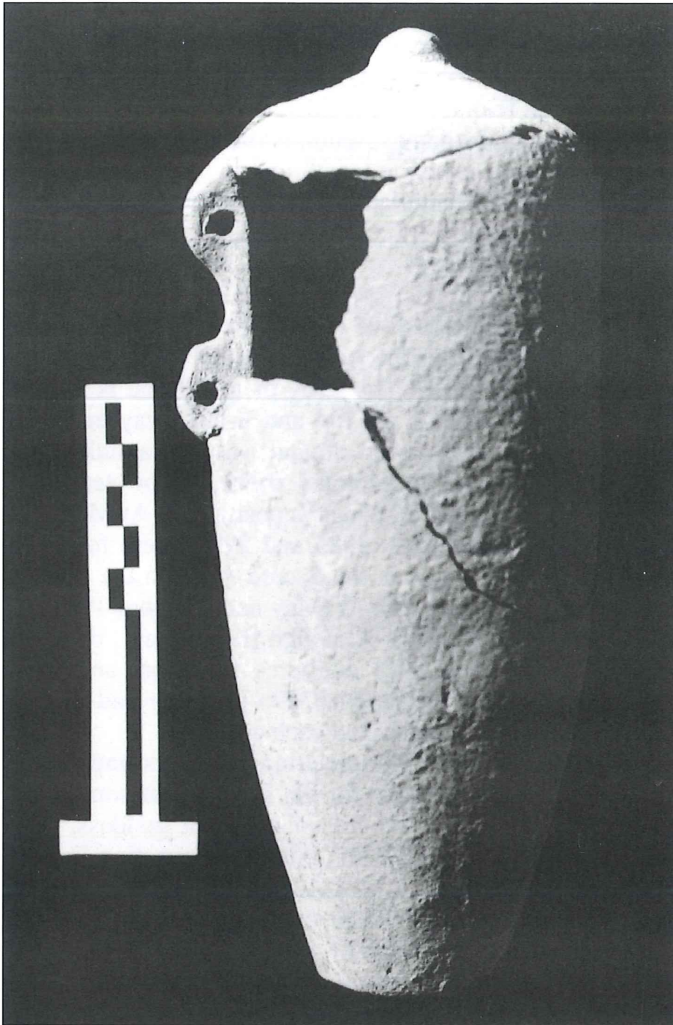
now resides in the National Museum of Denmark (Inv. No. 7806) (FIG. 10). This ceramic vessel, which is dated to the Early Dynastic Period, is beehive in shape with a flat base tapering towards the top where it has a raised conical knob. An opening has been cut out of the middle of the vessel, to the left of which is a small protruding knob to fasten a door or window in place. The corresponding window or door still remains and also has a small protruding knob for fastening.

Many ‘model granaries’ have been found in Early Dynastic tombs at numerous sites in Egypt. At Tarkhan, for instance, three examples in baked clay were found in Mastaba No. 2038, which belongs to the First Dynasty (Petrie 1914: 4, Pl. XV). Two of these are cylindrical in shape, taper towards an opening at the top, and have windows incised on the side at two levels. The third is rectangular in shape with straight sides, an open roof and an incised doorway on the side. A rough red ceramic ‘model granary’ comprising twelve domed silos was found in a Fourth Dynasty mastaba tomb at el-Kab (Quibell *et al.* 1898: 4, Pl. VI.2). Each individual storehouse has an opening at the top, sealed by a conical stopper. Several ‘model granaries’ made of pottery and unburned clay, also dating to the First Dynasty, were found at Ḥilwān/ Helwan (Saad 1947: 26, Pl. XIb). One example is cylindrical in shape, tapers towards an opening at the top and has windows incised on the side at two levels, similar to those at Tarkhan. Other cylindrical examples do not taper towards the top but are still open. Some also have small square openings towards the bottom, while some have incised windows. Other, smaller domed examples resemble those from el-Kab and have both stoppers on the top and openings on the side.

An example of a ‘model granary’ chronologically closest to the vessel from Site 38 comes from Esna (Tomb



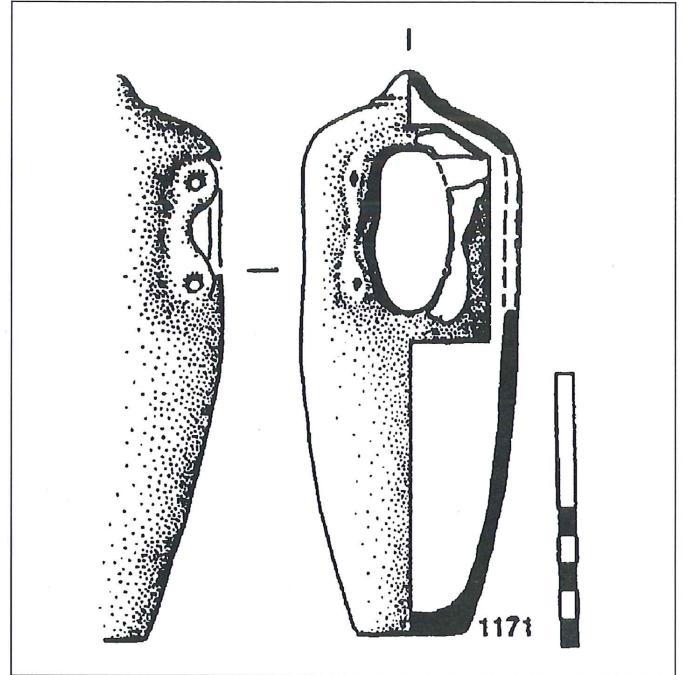
6. A selection of the ceramics from Site 38 (M. Schroder).



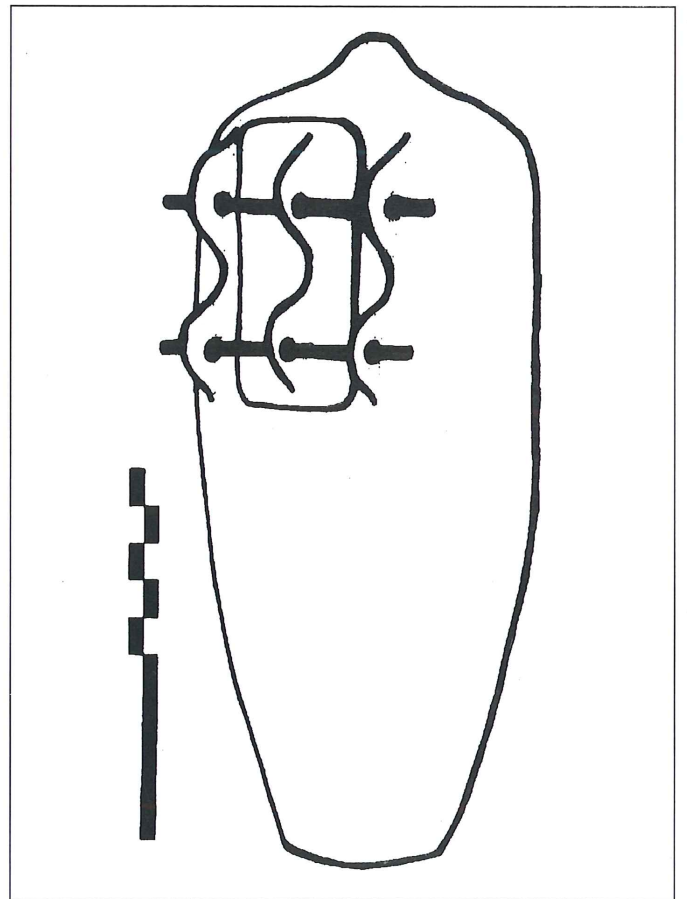
7. Photograph of the ceramic vessel from Site 38 (The University of Sydney Hauran Project).

153t) and dates to the Second Intermediate period (Downes 1974: 93, 94, Fig. 64; Tooley 1995: 38, Fig. 35). The vessel, now in the University of Liverpool (Museum Inv. No. E4292) is of the domed or beehive type, being made of an upturned ceramic jar, and is similar to the example in the National Museum of Denmark discussed above. Similarly, an opening has been cut out of the middle of the vessel, to the left of which is a small protruding knob to fasten a door or window in place. Unlike the example in the National Museum of Denmark, the corresponding window or door has not survived. A similar vessel was found in the cemetery of Hu at Diospolis Parva in Tomb W70, which is dated to the XII Dynasty (Petrie 1901: 43, Pl. XXV).

Other comparative examples for the vessel from Site 38 come from a group of vessels from the Levant identified as 'model shrines'. They are common in the Late Bronze Age, and are often found in temple or sanctuary contexts. Two vessels of this type were found at Hazor



8. Drawing of the ceramic vessel from Site 38 (The University of Sydney Hauran Project).



9. Reconstruction of the vessel from Site 38 (S. Eames).



10. 'Model Granary' (Inv. No. 7806) (courtesy of the National Museum of Denmark).

(Yadin *et al.* 1960: 109, Pl. CXXIII, 4; 1989: 271, Pl. CCLXXXII, 1), one of which comes from the Temple in Area H, Stratum 1A. Four examples from Dayr 'Allā were all found in the Late Bronze Age Sanctuary (Franken 1992: 28, Fig. 3-8, 12; 38, Fig. 4-2, 16; 67, Fig. 4-24, 14 and 79, Fig. 5-8, 30), while at Kamid el-Loz four examples were found in the Late Bronze Age temple (Metzger 1993: 212-213, 251, nos. 400, 404, 625 and 626, Tafel 72-75). Two examples were also found in Late Bronze Age contexts at Ugarit (Schaeffer 1949: 194, Fig. 79A-D, 1-4, Pl. XXX). Little information or discussion, however, is provided for these vessels, and there is no suggestion that they were found in contexts of a cultic nature.

Numerous 'model shrines' have also been found in Iron Age contexts. These include a rectangular terracotta shrine on display at the Jordan Archaeological Museum, which has an entrance flanked by two naked women playing tambourines (Zayadine 1991: 39, Fig. 37). A shrine

very similar to the Jordan Museum example belongs to the American University of Beirut Museum (Baramki 1967: object no. 46, case 27A). It is similar in shape but has the added feature of a moulded door frame, which like the shrine in the Jordan Museum, is flanked by female figurines. A further example was found in 'Ammān tomb E (EA 130). It is rectangular in shape and decorated on the back and sides with vertical lines in dark brown and black (Dajani 1966: 41-42, Pl. I, Fig. 1, Pl. IV, No. 130). Iliffe also published a 'model shrine' of unknown provenance dated largely on the basis of style to the Iron II period and purchased by the Palestine Archaeological Museum (Iliffe 1944: 91-92, Pl. XXI). The body of the shrine is barrel-shaped with a knob at the top and a cut away entrance flanked by columns with double volute capitals supporting a high, flat undecorated frieze, in the centre of which a bird with spread wings is positioned. At Megiddo two pottery shrines (Nos. 2985 and 2986) were found in the Stratum IV Temple in the Sacred Area on the eastern side of the *tall* in loci 331-48 (May and Engberg 1935: 4-11, 13-17, Pls. XIII-XV). Although fragmentary, both are rectangular in shape with apertures for doors and windows. The front of facade No. 2896 probably had female figures or sphinxes standing at each corner.

According to some interpretations, these examples can be considered a receptacle for the insertion of some kind of offering for use in the cult of a god or goddess, possibly Astarte (Iliffe 1944: 91). Such a suggestion is supported by Dornemann, who proposes that the features of these shrines, and in particular the female figures flanking the entrances are indicative of a fertility cult (Dornemann 1983: 144). Similarly, according to Zayadine's analysis, these figures probably represent hierodules of the cult of the goddess Astarte (Zayadine 1991: 39).

A variation in context comes from Tel Dan, where a vessel identified as the 'snake house' was found in a small room (No. 7082) on a plaster floor alongside a variety of objects, including a chalice and fragments of crucibles (Biran 1994: 151-153, Fig. 111 and 112,1). This material is attributed to Phase V of the site, which belongs to the Iron I period. The vessel itself is cylindrical with a squat shaped body, tapering roof and front aperture, probably for a door. The complex in which this vessel was found has been identified on the basis of the objects found within it, including crucibles and blowpipes, as a metal workshop. According to Biran, it is tempting to see in the remains evidence for cultic practices associated with the metal industry.

The closest comparison, both chronologically and stylistically, to the ceramic vessel from Site 38 is the so-called "Shrine of the Silver Calf" from the coastal site of 'Asqalān/Ashkelon in southern Palestine (FIG. 11) (Stager 1991: 3-7). This ceramic 'model shrine' is cylindrical in shape with a flat base and a knob on top of a beehive





11. The "Shrine of the Silver Calf" from Ashkelon (courtesy of Prof. Lawrence Stager).

roof. At approximately 25cm in height it is similar in size to the vessel from Site 38. It has a doorway raised slightly above the floor and has hinge scars on the door jambs indicating where a clay door had once been fitted into place (Stager 1991: 5). The shrine was found lying shattered around the silver calf in the storeroom of a structure on the outer slope of the Middle Bronze Age rampart. The building, which has been identified as a sanctuary, was destroyed along with much of the city in the final phase of the Middle Bronze Age (MB IIC) in about 1600-1550 BC (Stager 1991: 3-4). This makes it largely contemporary to the vessel from Site 38. Apart from a slight difference in shape, the placing of the door on the vessel and the missing "door hinges", the Ashkelon 'model shrine' is very close to the vessel from Site 38.

### Summary and Conclusions

It can be seen from the above discussion that the function of 'model shrines' in the Levant and 'model granaries' in Egypt is quite different. Despite this, however, both are thought to have served a cultic function and are largely

found in cultic contexts. 'Model shrines', possibly for the housing of a cultic figure, are often found in contexts associated with temples and sanctuaries. 'Model granaries', are part of the furniture for the afterlife found in Egyptian tombs. While the excavation of Site 38 was not sufficiently extensive to indicate a clear function of the building, neither the nature of what was excavated, nor any of the other associated finds suggest a cultic function.

If the vessel from Site 38 is to be interpreted as representing a 'model shrine', it may have originally housed the figure of a deity similar to the "Shrine of the Silver Calf". The context in which it was found, however, differs from others in which 'model shrines' have been found. It may be better to view the vessel from Site 38 as serving a domestic cult function, probably in association with the storage and processing of agro/pastoral products. If this is the case, the vessel is similar to the 'snake house' from Tel Dan, which is similarly seen as having an industrial rather than cultic function. It may also be tempting to view this piece as an example of Middle Bronze Age domestic or household cultic practices, about which very little is known. In this way it may have served a similar function to vessels such as the Early Bronze Age house-shaped casket at Arad, which Amiran interprets as possibly having some domestic function, such as housing a divine image (Amiran 1978: 52, Pl. 66).

Alternatively, the vessel from Site 38 may represent a 'model granary'. The closest comparison, both chronologically and stylistically, is the Esna example, dated to the Second Intermediate Period. If the vessel from Site 38 does indeed represent a 'model granary', it would have served a very different function to those in Egypt. Clearly, the vessel is not related to burial practices and again may better be seen as representing domestic cult practices, in this case, associated with the storage and processing of agro/pastoral products. This interpretation is supported by other archaeological evidence from Site 38, including the high proportion of storage jars, the almost exclusive presence of barley in the botanical remains and several ground stone artefacts, all of which suggest that the area excavated was probably part of a grain storage and processing facility.

The overall conclusion to be made from the above discussion is that, whether the vessel from Site 38 represents a 'model shrine' or a 'model granary', it may have had a cultic function. If so, it is most likely to be associated with domestic or household cult practices, in particular, the storage and processing of local agro/pastoral products.

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