

A PLAQUE FIGURINE AT TALL AL-ḤAMMĀM, SEASON SIX (2011)

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Abstract

The subject of Iron Age figurines in the Southern Levant is frequently addressed. From typological studies, to speculation of function, to the more tentative research on subtopics such as gender roles and religion, these artifacts continue to fascinate and draw out new theories. This paper is a broad overview of past investigations concerning female figurines with a disk, as well as the study of a specific figurine discovered during Season Six (2011) at Tall al-Ḥammām in the Middle Ghawr. Excavators found the figurine *in situ*—in an IA2 context—among related ceramic and stone objects. We will examine the similarities and differences between this artifact and other Transjordan figurines in order to provide additional insights into the purpose(s) of this form of representational art.

Introduction

The Tall al-Ḥammām Excavation Project (TaHEP) is a joint venture of Trinity Southwest University (TSU) and the Department of Antiquities (DoA) of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the co-direction of Dr. Steven Collins (TSU) and Mr. Hussein Aljarrah (DoA), under the auspices, and with the support, of Dr. Ziad Al-Saad, Director General of the DoA. TSU began the excavations in 2005/6 (Season One), and entered into the Project partnership with the

DoA in 2008 (Season Three). In December of 2010 (Season Six), TSU and the DoA extended their cooperation by signing a new ten-year Joint Scientific Project Agreement. Detailed Season Activity Reports are filed with the Department of Antiquities: Season One (Collins, *et al.*, 2006); Season Two (Collins, *et al.*, 2007); Season Three (Collins, *et al.*, 2008); Season Four (Collins, *et al.*, 2009); Season Five (Collins, *et al.*, 2010); and Season Six (Collins, *et al.*, 2011).

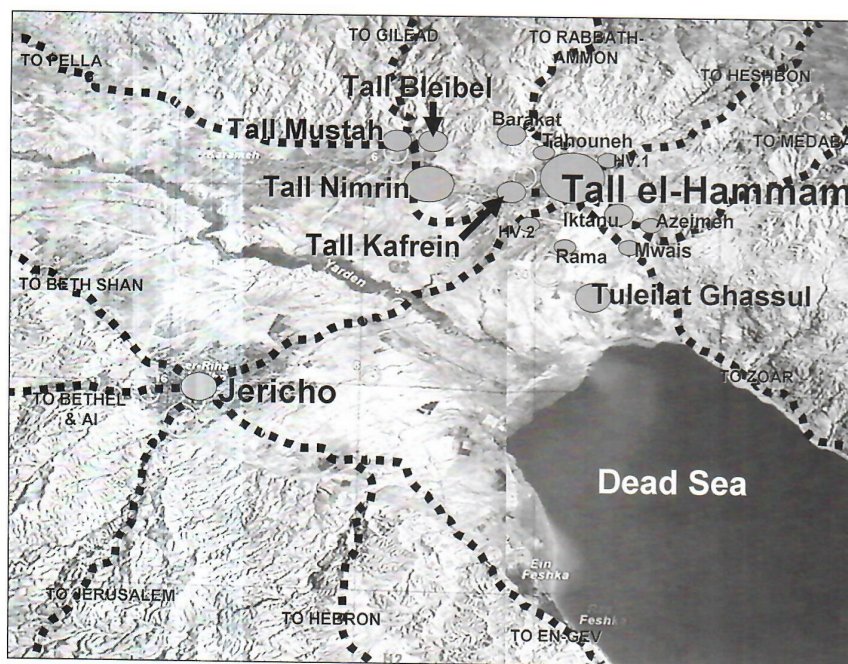
The figurine that is the subject of this paper emerged from the Field LA excavations during Season Six, which occurred during December 2010 and January 2011.

A Brief Geography and Physical Condition of Tall al-Ḥammām (Fig. 1)

The tall itself is situated in the southern Jordan Valley 12.6km northeast of the Dead Sea and 11.7km E of the Jordan River (Collins 2009: 385). The name “Ḥammām” refers to its hot springs and abundant fresh water springs that still flow today. The site is comprised of both an upper and lower tall with an occupational footprint extending N/S from the Wādī al-Kafrayn to the Wādī ar-Rawḍa measuring approximately 36 hectares.¹ The site straddles the intersection of the ancient E-W trade route from the ‘Amman Citadel and Ḥisbān (Heshbon) to Jericho and Jerusalem (Collins 2009: 386). Overall, the

1. In the early 1990's, K. Prag estimated the size of Tall al-Ḥammām at more than 15 hectares (Prag 1993: 272). Due to TaHEP's extensive surveying of both the upper and lower tall, evidence now shows the total area to be around 36 hectares. S. Collins and C. Kobs performed surface sherding during Season Six on the far E side of the tall that had not taken place before due to intensive farming. Positive results from this surface survey considerably expands the occupational footprint of the site.

The (now) square-kilometer general occupation area of Tall al-Ḥammām does not include the contiguous sacrescape and necroscape (dolmens, tombs, menhirs, megalithic stone alignments, stone circles, and ritual avenues) to the NE, E, SE, and S of the site. Remnants of several dolmens and tombs are even evident at both the western and eastern extremities of the lower tall. Unfortunately, the present expansion of ar-Rawḍa is demolishing many of these important features.



1. Map showing Tall al-Ḥammām and surrounding ancient sites, roads and highways (courtesy, S. Collins).

site was the largest Bronze Age city in the southern Jordan Valley, and included numerous satellite towns and villages within its hegemony.

Tall al-Hammām's upper city sits astride a natural hill resulting in a total height of approximately 30m above the lower tall. Unfortunately, the upper tall is somewhat marred by (past) military trenches and ingress-egress roads. Other than this minor imposition, no prior archaeological activity took place on the upper tall—except for surface surveying—before Season One of TaHEP. One of the earliest examinations and recordings was accomplished in the 1940s by N. Glueck (Glueck 1945: 378-382).

While excavating at Tall Iktānū (c. 2km S of Tall al-Ḥammām) in 1990, K. Prag briefly excavated a small area near the western edge of lower Ḥammām where she initiated several probes (Prag 1993: 271-273). Her work was abruptly terminated due to the discovery of landmines (Prag 1993: 273). In addition to these soundings, data regarding Tall al-Ḥammām were also published in past surveys; however, much of

this material has proved inadequate due to its cursory nature.² Beyond these few observations and publications, TaHEP is the first project to provide rigorous scientific research, exploration, and excavation of this important site.

In the past and currently, the area occupied by Tall al-Ḥammām has suffered from aggressive agricultural activities, particularly the lower levels. Each season, local banana and vegetable crops have interfered with our excavation plans, at times making research and work in some areas of the tall difficult. Despite these hindrances, Tall al-Ḥammām, historically and presently, is often described as “outstanding and impressive” (Glueck 1945: 379) and “one of the largest ancient ruins in the Jordan Valley” (Ji and Lee 2002: 188). Indeed, its sheer magnitude continues to impress all those who visit the site.

A Broad Overview of Archaeological Strata at Tall al-Hammām

Tall al-Hammām continues to make an impact with its long, seemingly continuous Bronze

2. The second part of “The East Jordan Valley Survey” in 1976 focused on the region of Tall al-Hammām. Their report indicates that Tall al-Hammām was inactive during Middle Bronze 2 (Ibrahim et al. 1988: 196). However, while they missed the massive MB1-2 mudbrick rampart system surrounding the upper tall (now well known through excavation), they also failed to account for the tremendous quantity of MB1-2 pottery across

the lower tall. (Perhaps these omissions were due to the fact that large portions of the site were being used for military purposes at the time, and were possibly inaccessible.) At the writing of this paper, of the 3,925 diagnostic pottery sherds documented from excavated strata through Six Seasons, 1,058 are from Middle Bronze 2 (27 %).

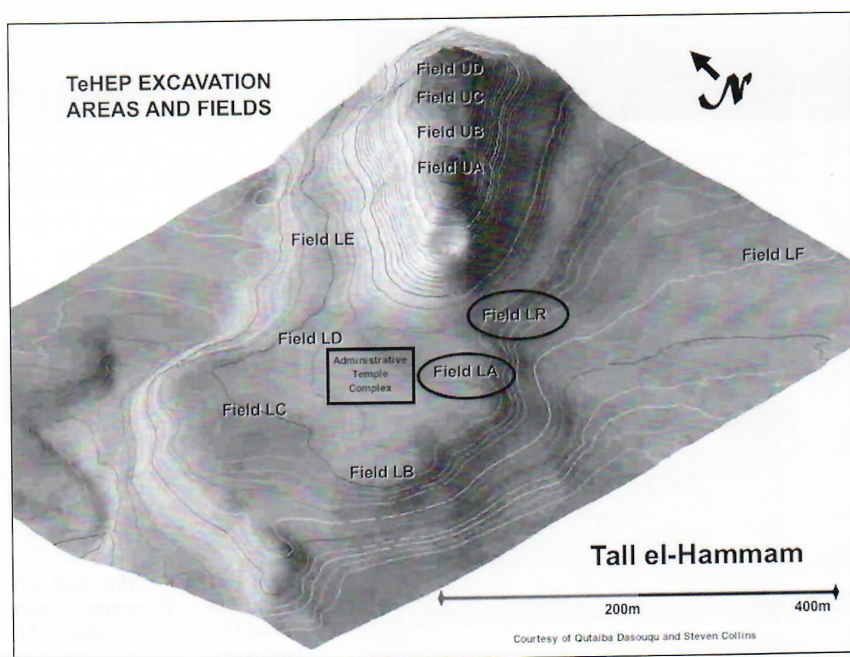
Age occupation and later Iron Age strata. During each season we have encountered increasing evidence that the city was periodically rebuilt despite destruction indicators (earthquakes?) from the Chalcolithic Period through the Middle Bronze Age. Thereafter, a lengthy occupational gap exists through Late Bronze Age and most of Iron Age 1. Settlement reappeared on the upper tall in Iron Age 2 (beginning ca. 1000 BC). At the SW base of the upper tall is a Roman bath/cistern complex, and a few minor Roman and Hellenistic architectural features remain on the eastern extremity of the upper tall.

During the first three seasons, work was confined to the upper tall. The strata were predominately MB2 and IA2, and included a massive MBA rampart encircling the upper city. Excavation revealed a former EBA structure in one square, but more exposure is needed to determine its purpose. Although two figurine fragments were unearthed on the upper tall, they were not as enlightening as the Season Six figurine.

In Season Four through Season Six, we concentrated our efforts in three locations on the lower tall: one in Field LR, and two in Field LA. (One of the Field LA locations was selected after a local landowner/farmer had removed a sizeable banana grove and generously offered to refrain from future planting so we could ex-

cavate). Several squares were positioned in the Roman area (Field LR) near the hot spring. Additional squares were placed in two locations in Field LA; the first set constituted a N/S trench (Trench LA.27-28) excavated for 60 meters (now clearly visible on Jordan MEGA), and the second set of squares in Field LA were placed in a probable (now confirmed) sacred precinct at the geographical center of the lower city (Fig. 2). The architecture, ceramics, and material finds from Trench LA.27-28 have all dated from the Chalcolithic Period through Middle Bronze Age with no period or phase gaps, signifying continuous occupation through the successive strata. Indeed, Tall al-Ḥammām's Bronze Age inhabitants created the bulk of the lower tall.

So, it was a complete surprise to the TaHEP staff when, during Season Six, Iron Age 2 artifacts emerged just centimeters from the surface of a newly-opened square inside a large building within the Bronze Age sacred precinct. It presently appears that IA2 inhabitants constructed a small religious precinct of their own within the larger perimeter of a (much) earlier Bronze Age temple platform. Whether these Iron Age religious practitioners actually re-built and re-used parts of the (already ancient) Bronze Age sacred space, or were simply "squatting" within the ruins of the former religious complex, is yet to be determined. (Had they ascertained the sa-



2. Topographical map of excavation areas (courtesy, Q. Dasouqi and S. Collins).

cred character of the location they had chosen to practice their rituals? Perhaps future excavations and analyses will suggest an answer to this question.)

Context of the Figurine and Surrounding Objects (Fig. 3)

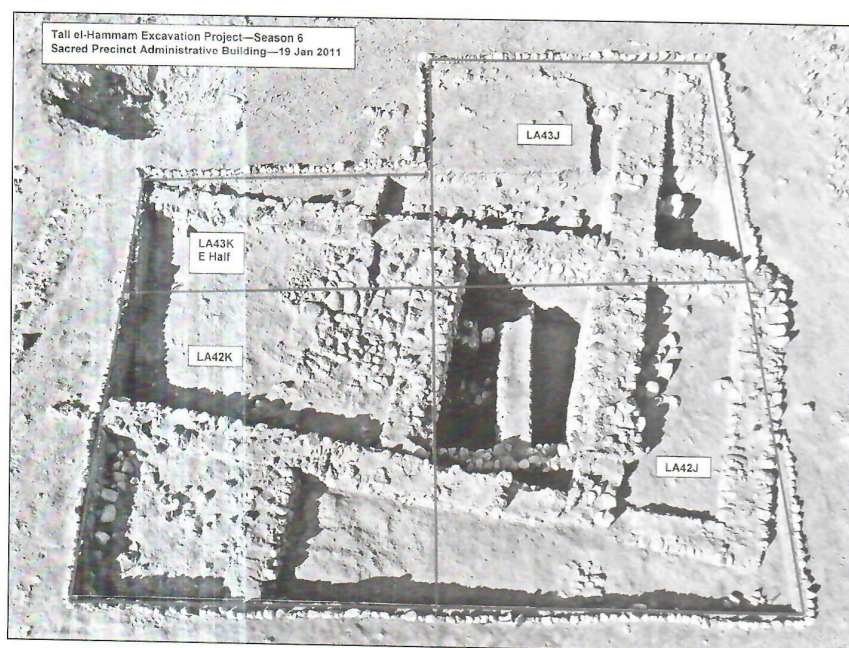
At the beginning of Tall al-Ḥammām Season Six, an Iron Age 2 plaque figurine (holding a disk) excavated from Square LA.42K entered the archaeological spectrum. The figurine (Object 391) was found in a room located in the NE corner of a large (20x60m) “administrative” building in what is believed to be a sacred precinct originally constructed during the Bronze Age. (The building to the E has the dimensions of a large temple, based on its 3m-thick walls and associated circular stone altar.) A 4.5x2.5m probe—constituting a full room within the building—was excavated within LA.42J during previous season. That probe went down 1.5m and exposed four successive levels of stone foundations from the EB3, IBA, and MB1/2. Based on this and the small size of the probe, we made the decision during Season Six to expand the excavation area to incorporate the four contiguous 6x6m squares around the probe (i.e., Squares LA.42J and LA.43J W of the probe, LA.42K S of the probe, and LA.43K SW of the probe).

Squares LA.42K and LA.43K included, in

part, a room bounded by a stone foundation on the probe’s south side. The room is approximately 4.5x7m. In the loci immediately under surface soil within that room were found multiple IA2 vessels and artifacts among which were the plaque figurine, a cylindrical limestone incense altar (Fig. 4), two cooking pots, and a juglet. The larger of the two cooking pots (Object 394) was found in Locus 1 of LA.42J (Fig. 5), broken but mendable. About 30cm south of



4. Stone incense altar (Object 393) (photo, M. Luddeni).



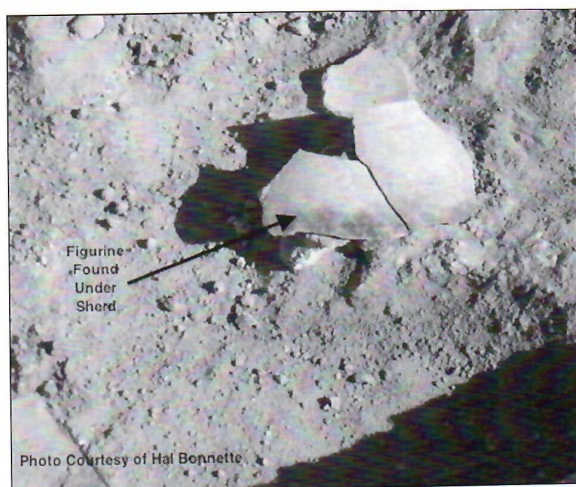
3. Squares where the Tall al-Ḥammām Figurine was found (lower tall) (photo, M. Luddeni).

the cooking pot were two additional pieces of the pot. The figurine lay facedown in two pieces underneath the two sherds, just 24cm below the top of Locus 1 (Fig. 6).

The stone incense altar is significant in relation to the figurine. Similar incense altars are known from the Bronze and Iron Age, and were in use until the classical periods. They seem always associated with worship and cultic practices. Observances involving incense altars often included chalices and figurines (Gitin 2002: 95). Most of the stone incense altars W of the Jordan River studied by S. Gitin were of the “horned” type, but there were various other styles. Examples include five incense altars without horns excavated at Tel Dan. Of these, two were cylindrical like the one found in Square LA.42J. They



5. In situ IA2 cooking pot (photo, M. Luddeni).



6. Sherds overlaying the disk figurine (photo, H. Bonnette).

date to the 10th century BC, discovered *in situ* at the entrance to a temple. Hornless incense altars are also known from Arad and Ekron. Overwhelmingly however, horned altars and “block” forms were among the earlier styles. Later, the horns became flattened and, by the 7th century BC and beyond, small stone altars were virtually hornless (Gitin 1989: 62).

The *in situ* appearance of both a ritual figurine and a stone altar within the same stratum (IA2b-c) is noteworthy from an historical perspective. From the biblical text, Jeremiah 44:23-25 mentions offerings made to “the queen of heaven,” while v.17 of the same chapter mirrors this 7th/6th century BC tradition whereupon devotees would “make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her... both we and our fathers...in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem”. The language of this passage implies an ancient tradition whereby the practice of making offerings to a female deity were handed down in a ritualistic setting from generation to generation. The association of altars with idols (figurines) is found in other biblical texts, both in warnings by prophets as well as in descriptions of “legitimate” celebrations with burnt offerings. Ezekiel 6:4, 6:6, Isaiah 17:8 and 27:9 speak of these two objects in the same phrase, suggesting a common ritual linkage between them.

Features of the Tall al-Ḥammām Figurine with a Disk (Figs. 7, 8, and 9)

The object from Tall al-Ḥammām is a female plaque figurine measuring 7.5cm in height and 4.5cm in width. She is mold-made without a flat, widened background, lending credence to a date of IA2b-c. Formerly, molds tended to leave a border of clay surrounding the actual figure. As time progressed, this extra margin of clay became narrower or nonexistent (Moorey 2001: 43). The portion below the waist of the Tall al-Ḥammām “lady” is lost due to breakage in antiquity, but her significant features are still intact.

Although the figurine is well-worn (by handling?), her facial features are identifiable. The left hand supports a disk-like object from its “bottom” edge, while the right hand is placed above the left on the “top” of the disk. Her fingers are beautifully delineated and without signs



7. Tall al-Ḥammām figurine in the field immediately after extraction (photo, M. Luddeni).



8. Tall al-Ḥammām figurine with a disk (illustration, L. Ritmeyer).

of jewelry. The disk itself is large—covering most of her upper torso—with a “band” along its circumference. The hairstyle falls in long



9. Tall al-Ḥammām figurine photo for Object Catalogue (photo, M. Luddeni).

ringlets behind her ears, and the bangs suggest rolled locks. Her eyes and ears are disproportionately large. The outline of her nose is visible-yet-worn, and her mouth is barely detectible due to deterioration. The clay fabric is reddish and coarse. (Currently, she resides in storage at the as-Salt Museum with Tall al-Ḥammām’s other artifacts.)

With the figurine’s discovery many questions arise. Who or what did she represent—a goddess, motherhood, fertility? What do similar artifacts reveal about her? What is the disk she tightly holds—a tambourine, a loaf of bread, an offering tray? What does the disk signify? Were similar figurines common to the Transjordan? Was she made locally or traded in from another place? How was this figurine used in ritual practice?

A Forewarning

In researching the figurine it became clear that several factors required attention before

the above questions (and others) could be addressed. Initially, there is the fact that numerous figurines have been published without proper framework and/or context. Unfortunately, well-reasoned dates are not available for such artifacts and, therefore, one can only compare them to those excavated *in situ*. Surface and unprovenanced figurines must be studied with this in mind as comparisons are made.

As “disk” figurines predominately date from the Late Bronze Age to the late Iron they are not uncommon and it is possible that we might be able to identify our “lady” and her disk, or at least make a reasonable connection with other figurines. However, the popularity of certain goddesses varied period to period and locale to locale, and it is not out of the question that the same “basic” image could have represented different deities through time and geography. So, if her association with a specific goddess is inconclusive, we may have an identity crisis on our hands!

Another issue to bear in mind are the agendas of given authors. While archaeological reports chiefly provide facts and details about their figurines (Daviau 1997; O’Byrhim 1997), other works may have hidden (or acknowledged) agendas. C. Meyers approaches the subject of “female figurines with a disk” from the standpoint of gender in ancient societies (Meyers 1991), while S. Paz views them from a musical perspective (Paz 2007). T. Burgh takes a rather fluid view of figurine identity by positing a hermaphrodite angle, but his ideas about the possibility of male cross-dressing seem farfetched (Burgh 2004). While these diverse views might lend some understanding and/or depth to the subject, one should be wary of a writer’s preconceptions and propensities.

Lastly and unfortunately, we have become aware of the problems of inadequate publications and resultant difficulties in obtaining complete catalogue lists of figurines. Thanks to the Jordan Department of Antiquities, we now know of several figurines found in Jordan which had not been published. K. Hamden from the DoA was instrumental in guiding us to D. Sugimoto’s book dealing specifically with female disk-bearing figurines (Sugimoto 2008), and J. Haroun from the Department enlightened us concerning several Transjordan figurines from excavated contexts.

Female Figurines with a Disk

In order to understand this type of artifact, one must examine the range of types and descriptions of all female figurines with a disk. J. Pritchard studied 294 figurines, grouping them into seven classifications. Of these seven, Type Five was the disk-holding figurine, and included both the plaque and pillar types (Pritchard 1943: 19-21). Plaque figurines were made from a mold and not intended to stand by themselves. Pillar figurines, however, were formed in two parts and made to stand independently. The head and upper torso were molded or handmade, then attached to a cone-shaped body that was usually hollow, but some solid forms are known. Most pillar figurines do not show individual fingers, whereas plaque figurines generally do. Overall, Type Five forms vary greatly. Their disks are held on either side, at the waist, or centered (Sugimoto 2008:17-35). They could be clothed or nude—veiling and jewelry optional—with hairstyles ranging from plain to ornamented. Several examples are even pregnant or holding a bird (Pritchard 1943:19-21).

Disk figurines appeared in most regions of the ancient Near East beginning in the Late Bronze Age. Pritchard notes that their prototypes are found in Mesopotamia, which correlates with Paz’ musicological research that frame-drums originated in that area (Pritchard 1943: 14-17; Paz: 89-90). Plaque-style disk figurines first appeared in the Late Bronze Age, but underwent several changes in form. At first, the background was wide and flat as if the female were lying on a bed. Later, in the 12th century BC and onward, the background slowly narrowed, disappearing altogether in the late Iron Age (Moorey: 43). Plaque figurines from coastal cultures—the Phoenicians in particular—are often hollow, have exaggerated ears, and sport shoulder-length locks (Kletter 2001: 183). These features match the Tall al-Ḥammām figurine. Pillar types originated later than the plaque varieties, and those with a perpendicular disk were mainly Phoenician.

Overall, from studying the regional popularity of Levantine disk-holding figurines, it appears they were common in both the Cisjordan and the Transjordan from IA1 through the mid-9th century BC. After the mid-9th century there was a sharp decline of the figurines in Israel

and Judah, perhaps due to religious reforms or the subsequent Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. However, as Phoenician culture rapidly advanced, the popularity of these figurines increased in the coastal areas, while retaining ritual status in Transjordan and Edom (Sugimoto 2008: 74, 109-112).

Theories regarding possible motivations for the creation of disk figurines abound. Some have proposed that they were fashioned as toys, or even educational “props”, although many were found in tombs. Others suggest that they were representations of deceased people. Still others conjecture that they served as offerings in temples or souvenirs of temple celebrations. Nonetheless, the majority of researchers define them as private devotions, perhaps magical petitions, for cultic functions (Sugimoto 2008: 1-14; Paz: 118; Moorey 2001: 7-8).

Are these figurines found solely in ritual settings such as the one at Tall al-Ḥammām? In analyzing the locations of disk figurines from houses, cultic installations, and tombs in both the Cisjordan and Transjordan during the 9th century BC, 54% of plaques and 52% of pillars were from cult-related contexts. After the 9th century, these objects continued in popularity only in Phoenicia and Transjordan and were absent in Israel (Sugimoto 2008: 51-64). As discussed below, this evidence suggests a potential motivation for the production of the figurines, and leads to a possible identification of both the figurine and her disk.

Identification of the Disk

What is she holding? Over the past decades, interpretations of the disk have not been in short supply. In the 1960s, some compared the disk of a figurine from Gezer to Syrian solar disks (Sugimoto 2008:9). Because of the popularity and significance of the sun and moon in antiquity, this seems reasonable, especially in light of the Egyptian figures with sun disks. Later, the discovery of a new Cypriot form gave rise to the idea that the disks were spheres representing sacred stones called baetyls. Baetyls were actually iron meteorites that the goddess held as she stood in the temple (O’Byrhim 1997: 40). P. Lapp, in his excavations at Ta’anek, first identified the disk as a loaf of bread. Four years later he changed his mind, hypothesizing that the ob-

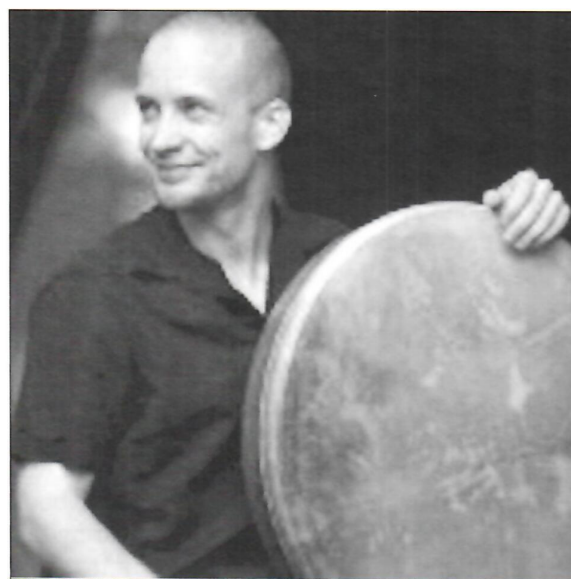
ject was a musical instrument (Lapp 1964: 39, 1967: 36).

The “drum” hypothesis is the current favorite among scholars, although there are differing opinions as to the specific type of instrument. The disk is frequently identified as a tambourine, and has been classified as such by several interpreters; however, nothing on the disk suggests the representation of cymbals. A more reasonable suggestion is that the disk represents a frame drum (Fig. 10). Paz discusses and sets forth criteria for membranophones at great length. A frame drum consists of a membrane, generally made of leather, stretched tightly over a circular frame. When struck, the membrane produces a typical “drum” sound. Various cuts and/or indentions in the outer edge of the frame itself can modify the performance of the instrument, thus altering the sound. The disk of the Tall al-Ḥammām figurine does have an indentation along its edge.

The conclusion that the disk is a musical instrument is further substantiated when the figurine is compared to a disk in the Ashdod “stand of musicians”. Although the figurines on this artifact are all male, one of the Ashdod figures holds a similar disk while other figures hold various musical instruments (Paz 2007: 104).

Harlot, Goddess, or Lady?

The identification of the female herself con-



10. Example of a frame drum (courtesy, D. Kuckhermann).

tinues to generate interest. Whom or what does she exemplify? Was she a sacred prostitute, priestess or goddess, or did she simply represent the female gender of a particular era? Unfortunately, there is no known inscriptional evidence attached to any female disk-bearing figurine (Moorey 2001: 38).

In Mesopotamia and the Levant, certain female plaque images have been dubbed “Woman at the Window”. A window frames her face, and she has ornate ringlets with large eyes and ears similar to the Tall al-Ḥammām figurine. These objects are clay or ivory and date from the late 9th to the 7th centuries BC. Because they were manufactured in Phoenicia for a Mesopotamian market, they are often associated with the Sumerian goddess, Inanna, and the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar, both of which can carry the title “deity of (ritual) prostitutes”. She is also known as Kalili, which means “garlanded one” (Stuckey 2007: 1-7). While these particular figurines were presumably furniture decorations and do not hold a disk—one does hold a large ring—the similarities cannot be ignored; thus, ours might be the “Harlot of Hammam”.

Both Paz and Meyers view the represented female as a mortal. Paz notes that drumming was a feminine tradition, and that the figurines perhaps served as amulets or temple offerings, but not as objects of worship. If anything, they could represent drummer-priestesses in a cult, but not goddesses. This stems from the idea that, in the late 8th century BC Cisjordan, Yahweh had become the prominent male deity while Asherah, Ashtoret, or Anat played a minor role as Yahweh’s female attendant, but not his equal (Paz 2007: 104, 114-118). Therefore, it is argued, she would not have taken on god-status in her own right, but was perhaps represented by sacred prostitutes both in flesh and clay.

In an attempt to shed light on the subject, Meyers discusses the feminine nature and activities of Israelite women during this period. She focuses on female images in plain, unadorned dress, suggesting that painted lines represent clothing lines and not jewelry. However, she fails to address figurines that do not conform to these peculiarities. She does document spe-

cific texts describing post-warfare celebrations in which female musicians played in honor of the victorious army. Thus, Meyers argues, the women exercised “control and prestige” if only temporarily (Meyers 1991: 19, 23, 25). Because her research focuses on what the feminine iconography might say about the roles of women in ancient societies, her approach is not a systematic analysis of the female figurines.

Perceived associations between female figurines and goddesses are widely published. In the Late Bronze Age there were numerous female deities that the figurines could have represented. However, during Iron Age 2, only Asherah and Astarte were renowned (Sugimoto 2008: 3).³ Asherah gained notoriety among current scholarship when two 8th/7th century BC inscriptions surfaced, revealing a relationship between “Yahweh and his Asherah” (Moorey 2001: 3-4), and spawning a significant amount of literature on the subject. Asherah had been widely represented in the Late Bronze Age—Ashirat at Ras Shamra—but in later Phoenician texts she became strictly Astarte. The earliest example of the name Astarte appears on an ivory box from Ur dating to the 7th century BC. In addition to her functions—principally related to fertility—in the Mesopotamian and Phoenician cultures, Astarte doubled as an Egyptian war-goddess for the 18th Dynasty (Pritchard 1943: 65-72). Sugimoto’s text on “figurines with a disk” also identifies Astarte as the most likely candidate for the female image (Sugimoto 2008: 85-87).

“Goddess” seems to provide a relatively well-defined identity for the disk figurines, an idea supported by their frequent appearance in cultic contexts. If the figure is holding or playing a frame drum, she very well could represent Astarte as a war goddess, whereupon Meyers’ textual examples of victory celebrations would make sense. This, coupled with the idea that Astarte had war connections within Egypt’s convoluted pantheon, takes the figurine identity a step further. Sugimoto addresses this in his analysis of the Hebrew word *top* = frame drum. In the sixteen of seventeen times “frame drum” is found in the Old Testament, it appears in the context of worship, banquets, and the welcom-

3. In Egypt, Hathor was a household deity, but most of the Hathor-style figurines held a lotus plant (Moorey 2001:

36-37).

ing of returning armies. In the cases of worship and banqueting other musical instruments and musicians are also present. Only in the war-victory march are women mentioned independently as the frame drummers (Sugimoto 2008: 69). Thus, “Astarte beating a drum” is a plausible, even likely, motif for the ancient Near East.

If “Astarte with a drum” is the representation of the Tall al-Ḥammām figurine, it is likely that her significance both as a fertility deity (TaH’s walled Iron Age town relied on agricultural production) and as a goddess of war (protection was critical for survival) is a reasonable assumption. It seems that the fertility dimension must play a key role in identifying the ritual function of the Ḥammām figurine due to the simple fact that the “cultic context” from which she was excavated lies on the lower tall well outside the city wall in what was likely an agricultural setting.

Other Transjordan Figurines

Throughout Jordan, female figurines continue to appear both in and out of excavated contexts. At the ‘Amman Citadel, most of the figurines discovered are ceramic plaques from various molds, consisting of coarse fabric similar to the Ḥammām figurine, with the same reddish-to-pinkish color. The ‘Amman Objects 28, 29, and 43 held disks but, unfortunately, their heads were not intact. One was nude, one was clothed, and one had a detailed design of concentric circles on the frame drum, with the hands positioned like those on the Tall al-Ḥammām plaque. Amman Objects 11-13 are heads only, with Object 13 having the most striking features in comparison to the Ḥammām figurine, particularly the large ears and eyes. A portion of Amman Object 13 was handmade (Mansour 2005: 551-555)—perhaps a hand-correction of an imperfection resulting from the molding process.

At Tall Jāwā excavators found eight female figurines. All were mold-made and found either in domestic contexts or as surface finds. None were found in religious buildings (Daviau 2002: 52-65). Near Jāwā, Khirbat al-Mudayna’s ancient dump is the predominant place for figurine finds, where excavators discovered the torso of a female figurine with a disk at the waist, with both hands clutching it. Within the same area, in the remains of a one-room house, two additional disk figurines were unearthed (Daviau 1997: 225).

Author, C. Kobs, first noticed the Tall Ṣāfūt figurine at the Salt Museum while cataloging objects from Tall al-Ḥammām. Tall Ṣāfūt is 12km north of ‘Amman. O. Chestnut is currently re-evaluating Tall Ṣāfūt, as prior excavations were neither detailed nor adequately published. The site has yielded many mold-made female figurines with features similar to the one from Tall al-Ḥammām (Figs. 11 and 12). They were found in a casemate room containing other cultic objects including horse and the other female figurine heads, chalices and lamps.

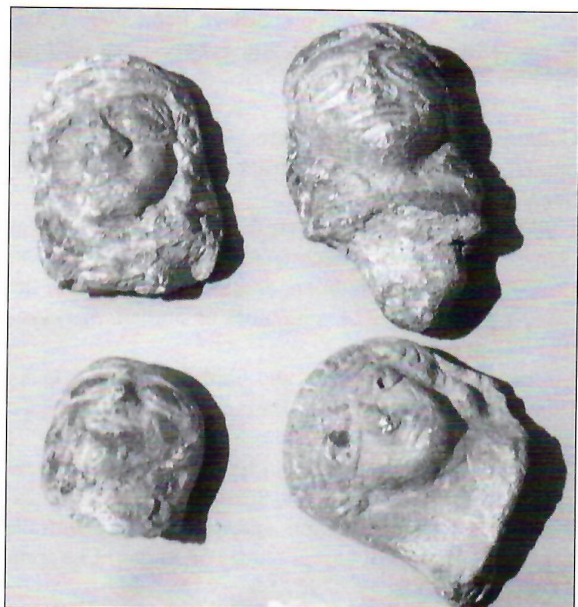
Conclusions

With all the appropriate caveats in place due to the speculative nature of any discussion of “mute” artifacts, it is reasonable to conclude that the Tall al-Ḥammām figurine is probably a representation of the goddess Astarte, and that the object she holds is a frame drum. Her features are not realistically proportioned as those of a typical woman. Perhaps the large, round eyes and oversized ears belong to a goddess who is eager to see and hear the supplications of her devotees.

The facial features, together with the long, curling locks of hair, suggest that her design originated along the Levantine coast (likely



11. Tall Ṣāfūt figurine (courtesy, O. Chestnut).



12. Tall Ṣāfūt figurine heads (courtesy, O. Chestnut).

Phoenicia), as she closely resembles figurines from that area. The fingers are well formed (even exaggerated), as they are on most plaque figurines with a disk, perhaps signifying the dexterity needed to play her instrument.

There is a single circle outlining the outer edge of the frame drum. It is not out of the question that it represents a “tuning-band” and not merely a decoration. Without any features that might signal the presence of cymbals, it is not likely that the instrument is a tambourine.

Her left hand holds the frame drum from underneath, while her right hand is higher and, in authentic fashion, seems to beat the disk/drum from above. It is not unreasonable to imagine that such drums provided accompaniment for songs associated with cultic rituals and celebrations. Perhaps drumming by female cultic practitioners (as embodiments of Astarte) provided calls to prayer and worship.

As a goddess of war (protection), the “lady” of 8th/7th century Tall al-Ḥammām—modeled in the flesh by female religious practitioners (conceivably sacred prostitutes) and commemorated on plaque figurines—undoubtedly greeted soldiers with victory songs, accompanied by frame drums, upon their safe return.

The disk figurine from Tall al-Ḥammām has a well-defined date-range within IA2b-c as a result of its sealed locus context with pottery ves-

sels lying directly on top of and near the figurine. The discovery of the figurine within the perimeter of the raised (100x100m) platform belonging to the more-ancient Bronze Age sacred precinct indicates that the religious practitioners responsible for the Iron Age 2 ritual installation may have possessed a sense of the location’s cultic past. The nearby incense altar virtually confirms that the Ḥammām figurine and its associated objects were used in a cultic setting.

Compared to the then-already-centuries-old buildings of Ḥammām’s massive Bronze Age temple complex, the IA2 cultic operation was little more than a squattage in the midst of what must have been sprawling ruins. Nonetheless, they plied their rituals, likely for the benefit of the local population—mostly farmers and laborers—living outside the defensive walls of the IA2 town perched atop the upper tall.

The many biblical references to incense offerings and idols during this period lend further credence to religious applications for the goddess of Ḥammām. Whether under the influence of Ammonite or Israelite religious traditions (likely both), those who ritually used Tall al-Ḥammām’s drumming female plaque figurine played an important role in the daily life of the local inhabitants.

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