

CERAMIC STAND FROM TELL EL-^oUMEIRI

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During the 1984 season at Tell el-^oUmeiri four pottery fragments were found in Field A (the Acropolis). They most likely come from the same object, a ceramic stand (Plate 1).¹ This may be the first ceramic stand of this type found in Transjordan. To the author's best knowledge it is the first one published.²

In Field A, three large buildings from the Late Iron II and Early Persian periods were uncovered. The middle and southern buildings, with thick-walled basement structures, are thought to have served administrative purposes.³ The remains of the ceramic

¹Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, Accession No. 84.0233; Dig Registration Number 84.456 (for all four pieces); Square 7K50, Locus 10, Pail 85, Location 16. Color: Fragment A and part of Fragment B, 5YR7/6 "reddish yellow"; Part of Fragment B, Fragment C and D, 2.5YR6/8 "light red"; core: 2.5YR0/5 "gray". Ware contains a large quantity of white grit.

²For other pottery stands and chalices from Transjordan see: G. Lankester Harding, "Two Iron Age Tombs from ^oAmman," *QDAP* 11 (1945): 70, fig. 9; 74, fig. 50; G. Lankester Harding, "Two Iron Age Tombs in Amman," *ADAJ* 1 (1951): 39-40, fig. 1:48; Rafik W. Dajani, "An Iron Age Tomb from Amman: Jabal el-Jofeh al-Sharqi," *ADAJ* 11 (1966): pl. I.2:9, pl. IV:155; Rafiq W. Dajani, "Jabal Nuhza Tomb at Amman," *ADAJ* 11 (1966): pl. XIV.13 (top row, third from the left), pl. XVII:47; Rudolph H. Dornemann, *The Archaeology of the Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1983), 217, fig. 24:15 (from Madaba); fig. 24:16 (from Madaba); fig. 24:14 (from Tell Deir ^oAlla); Khair Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*, (Amman: Department of Antiquity, University of Jordan, 1988), 117, fig. 4:2, pl. 8; William H. Morton, "A Summary of the 1955, 1956 and 1965 Excavations at Dhiban," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ed. Andrew Dearman (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 245-246; 320, fig. 14.

³R. W. Younker et al., "The Joint Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report of the 1989 Season, Including the Regional Survey and Excavations at El-Dreijat, Tell Jawa, and Tell el-^oUmeiri (June 19 to August 8, 1989)," *AUSS* 28 (1990): 23. Another possibility is that the south building was an administrative building proper and the middle building was a house of a wealthy family; see John Lawlor, "Field A: The Ammonite Citadel," *Madaba Plains Project 2: The 1987 Season at Tell el-^oUmeiri and Vicinity and Subsequent Studies*, eds. L. T. Geraty et al. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, forthcoming).

stand were found in the broad room (Room 2) of the middle building, which seems to be a typical Iron Age four-room house.⁴

Locus 10, where our fragments were found, was designated by the excavator as a "surface." This locus consisted also of "much lower debris." Locus 13, which was arbitrarily separated from Locus 10, could have been, together with Locus 10 (lower debris), a fill layer for Locus 10 (surface). In this fill our fragments were found. In both loci more than a dozen complete or mendable vessels were discovered.⁵ This suggests that the fill originated in the administrative/domestic complex of Field A. The vessels, including fragments of the stand, could have possibly fallen from the upper floor during the destruction. Yet, the possibility that they were brought to the area from outside must be left open.

Field Phase 2A, in which the above-mentioned loci were included, is a sort of ephemeral subphase. The stand might have been used in the major previous phase, Field Phase 2B. The latest pottery from these phases dates to the 5th century B.C.⁶

Reconstruction and Description

Although the four pieces do not join, a tentative reconstruction, aiming to present only a general aspect of the object, has been proposed (Plate 2). Fragment A evidently belongs to the upper part of the stand, Fragments B and C are presumably parts of the fenestrated pedestal, and Fragment D goes with the lower section, near the base. The reconstruction does not provide any additional details not seen on the sherds. Further details—for example, possible projections and additional decoration—could have existed.

⁴John Lawlor, "Field A: The Ammonite Citadel," *Madaba Plains Project 1: The 1984 Umeyri and Vicinity and Subsequent Studies*, eds. L. T. Geraty et al. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), figs. 15.3; 15.10.

⁵Lawlor, *Madaba Plains Project 1*, 238; unpublished locus sheet of Square 7K50, Locus 10.

⁶Lawlor, *Madaba Plains Project 2*, forthcoming. In 1987 this phase was renamed 4A. For a picture of Field Phase 2A (4A in 1987, 6A in 1989), see Lawlor, *Madaba Plains Project 1*, fig. 15.9; for a plan of Field Phase 2B (4B in 1987, 6A in 1989), see *ibid.*, fig. 15.3; for a plan of Field Phase 1B (3B in 1987), see *ibid.*, fig. 15.10. The pottery from Locus 10, according to the unpublished locus sheet, belongs to Late Iron II, Early Iron II, Iron I, Middle Bronze II, Early Bronze. The pottery read as "Late Iron II" in 1984 has also now been reevaluated as belonging to the Early Persian Period.

Because the fragments show a wheel-made manufacture, the principle of symmetry is followed in the reconstruction. The proposed vertical arrangement of the pieces may vary somewhat. An actual shape is difficult to predict since cult stands reveal a large variety of forms.⁷ Despite these limitations we can propose a realistic reconstruction.

The height obtained from the reconstruction could have been about 40 cm. or more. A survey of ceramic stands reveals that this is an average height.⁸ Since none of the fragments seems to belong to the base, the reconstruction of this part is even more tentative, with the suggested height being merely an estimation.

The upper part was apparently manufactured separately from the pedestal. Viewed from above, the top has a somewhat squared ovoid shape. Four projections, with their continuation along the body, were modeled by hand on the rim (Plate 3). A ridge was shaped inside, about 7 cm. from the top, forming a large opening in the basin of the stand, approximately 19 cm. in diameter. A finger-made depression, with one or two rows of tooled impressions in it, encircles the upper part.

The wheel-made pedestal has on its surface four vertical ridges which line up with projections on the rim. These give a squarish appearance to the pedestal. These ridges increase in width and thickness as they flare out from bottom to top. Probably eight ovoid rectangular and/or oval windows arranged in two rows were modeled in the body of the pedestal.

Reconstruction of the base follows the pattern of bell-shaped bases as known from the majority of stands with tubular pedestals.⁹

Parallels and Dating

The form of the stand, as reconstructed, seems to have no identical parallels, but can generally be attributed to the group

⁷Lamoine F. DeVries, "Cult Stands: A Bewildering Variety of Shapes and Sizes," *BAR* 13 July-August 1987: 27-37.

⁸Cf. examples given in nn. 9 and 10.

⁹Cf. Herbert G. May, *Material Remains of the Megiddo Cult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), pls. XIX-XX; DeVries, 36; Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 228, pl. 11; 250, pls. 33-34; Yohanan Aharoni et al., *Investigation at Lachish: The Sanctuary and the Residence* (Tel Aviv: Gateway Publishers, 1975), pls. 26, 43.

of cylindrical ceramic stands.¹⁰ It is hard to say whether the stand should be assigned to a group which Amiran calls "pedestaled bowls"—e.g., with bowl-like top made together with the pedestal—or to the group of stands with bowls and pedestals made separately.¹¹ Most probably, as implied by a circular hole in the basin, our stand could also have functioned as a pedestal for a bowl with a pointed bottom.¹²

The upper part, with its projections, is similar to Iron Age horned altars found in many places in Palestine.¹³ The horn shape however, may represent a later development. Other pottery stands with the top executed in this way are not known. A pedestaled bowl from EB III in Beth Shean exhibits a similar concept in executing four spouts in the rim.¹⁴

Fenestration is one of the main features of pottery stands. An object from MB II Nahariya reveals the same concept of windows symmetrically alternating with other devices. As reconstructed, the object from Tell el-^oUmeiri has four ridges. The stand from Nahariya has four vertical rows of eight handles; both stands have eight windows arranged in two rows.¹⁵

As seen above, one can only say that the object from Tell el-^oUmeiri fits well into the setting of Palestinian Bronze and Iron Age ceramic stands. The form, apart from the horn-like projections, does not appear to have a significant bearing on the exact dating.

The decoration encompassing the upper part of the stand provides further information on its date.¹⁶ Similar in its motif, but more stylish, is a kind of impression found on vessels unearthed in Palestine and dated to the Persian Period. This decoration, consisting of wedge-shaped impressions, is usually placed on the upper part

¹⁰Cf. n. 9 above and Ruth Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land from its Beginnings in the Neolithic Period to the end of the Iron Age* (Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1969), 304-306, photos 342-345, 349. Rectangular or house-shaped stands generate the other group (Amiran, photos 335, 346-347).

¹¹Amiran, 302-304.

¹²May, pl. XX; Aharoni et al., pl. 26:2.

¹³A near parallel in shape of horns is provided by a limestone altar from Megiddo, Stratum IV? [May's question mark], no. 2984 (May, pl. XII:2984).

¹⁴Amiran, 302, photo 334.

¹⁵Amiran, 303, photo 336. The fenestration of these stands may place them among a class of "temple models" as suggested by William Dever, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 152-153.

¹⁶I owe this suggestion to Randall W. Younker.

of the vessels. The ware associated with such ornamentation dates from the end of the 6th century to the end of the 5th century B.C.¹⁷ Our stand, bearing a possible imitation of this pattern, most likely belonged to this period, perhaps the first half of the 5th century, as is also implied by the associated pottery evidence.¹⁸

Function

We learn of the different uses of ceramic stands from three main sources. Wall reliefs and paintings from Egypt and Mesopotamia show their use. The artifacts themselves shed light on their function; their provenance and form, as well as the presence or absence of burning or discoloration, further suggest how they were employed. Textual sources add information on the topic.¹⁹

The stands were used for both sacred and profane ends. The stands held different kinds of offerings for the god, such as wine, oil, or food. They also served as incense burners in a variety of rites. They may have been used as libation funnels or cultic flower pots to hold sacred plants. In addition, ceramic stands appear to have been used for distinctly non-cultic functions. They held incense, which was burned for cosmetic purposes or to purify the air. They were also braziers for heating. At times, the stands simply supported bowls or lamps. Discarded stands could be reused in other capacities, as is seen in Hazor where a stand was reused as part of a temple's drainage channel.²⁰ Possibly the same ceramic stand could have served at different times, in both cultic and non-cultic functions.

All of these uses could have been acceptable for our stand, whether it functioned separately or with a pointed bowl.²¹ Although our pieces were not found in a cultic context, analogies to other stands suggest at least a non-exclusive cultic role. The horn-like projections could serve not only as possible supports for a bowl, but might have religious meaning as well.

¹⁷Ephraim Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.E.* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 134-136, figs. 224-226.

¹⁸Similar impressions appear on an amphora from Dreijjat, dated to the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period (Yunker et al., pl. 7).

¹⁹Cf. Fowler, 183-186 and DeVries, 27-37.

²⁰Yigael Yadin, *Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of The Bible* (New York: Random House, 1975), 113-114.

²¹Traces of burning in the basin apparently came from the post-depositional fire.

Conclusion

The stand and 36 ceramic figurines, some of which may have actually been parts of similar stands,²² unearthed at Tell el-^cUmeiri in Field A, might suggest that some sort of cultic activity, private or public, went on in the Late Iron II and Early Persian Period administrative complex. This by itself does not prove the existence of a distinct sacred place. However, potential cultic rituals may have been performed in ordinary rooms of this complex or even in a different place on the tell. Nonetheless, a future discovery of a proper shrine of any kind remains a possibility.

²²Cf. the author's forthcoming report on the figurines in *Madaba Plains Project 3. The 1989 Season at Tell el-^cUmeiri and Vicinity and Subsequent Studies*, eds. L. T. Geraty et al. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press).

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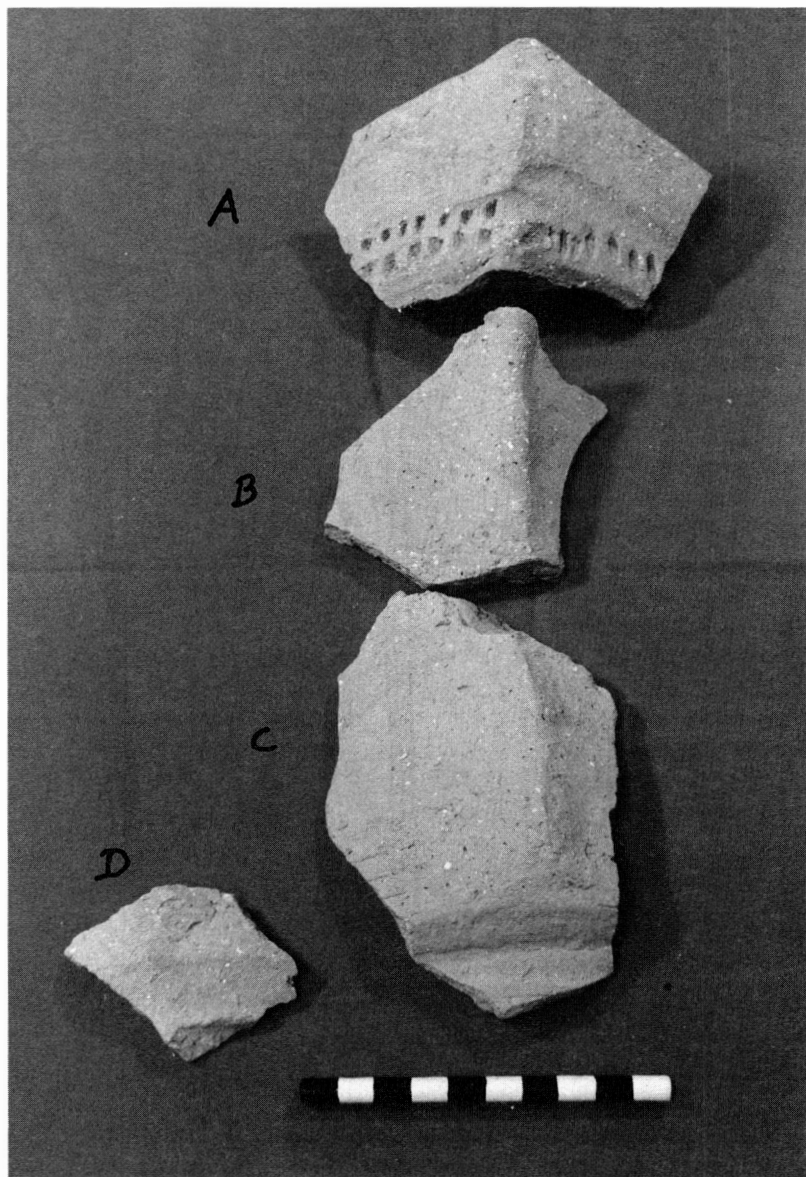


Plate 1. Four fragments of the stand. Photo by M. Ziese.

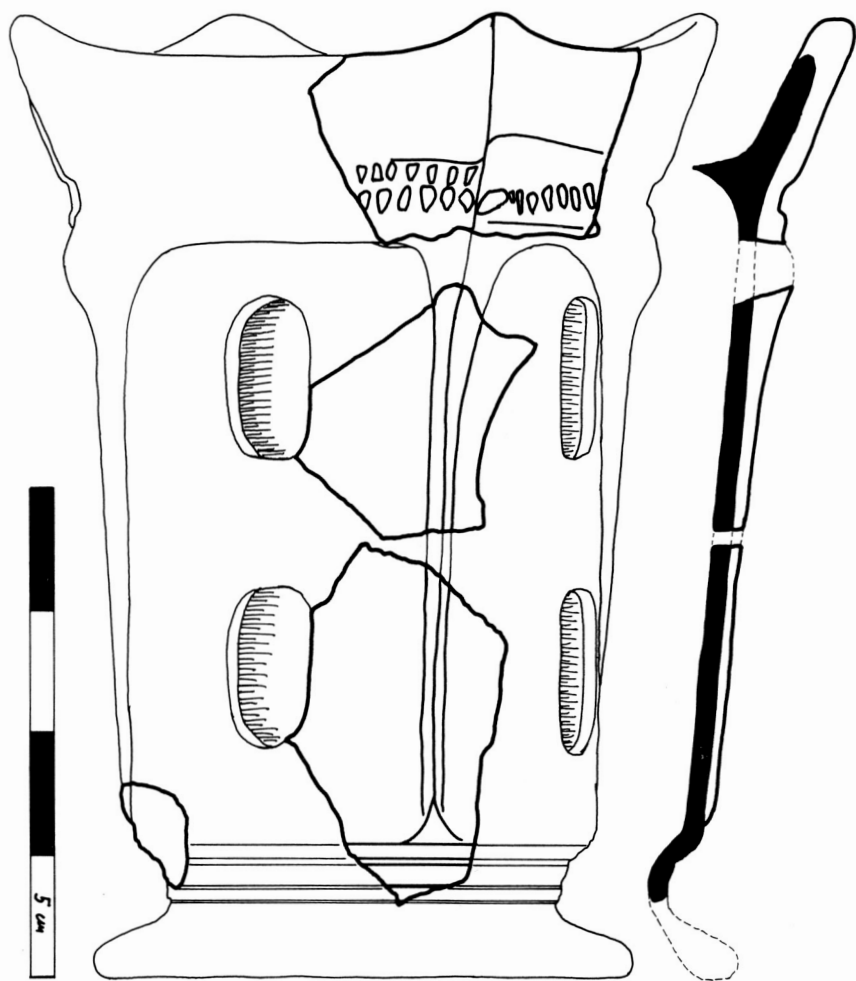


Plate 2. Reconstruction of the ceramic stand. Drawing by the author.

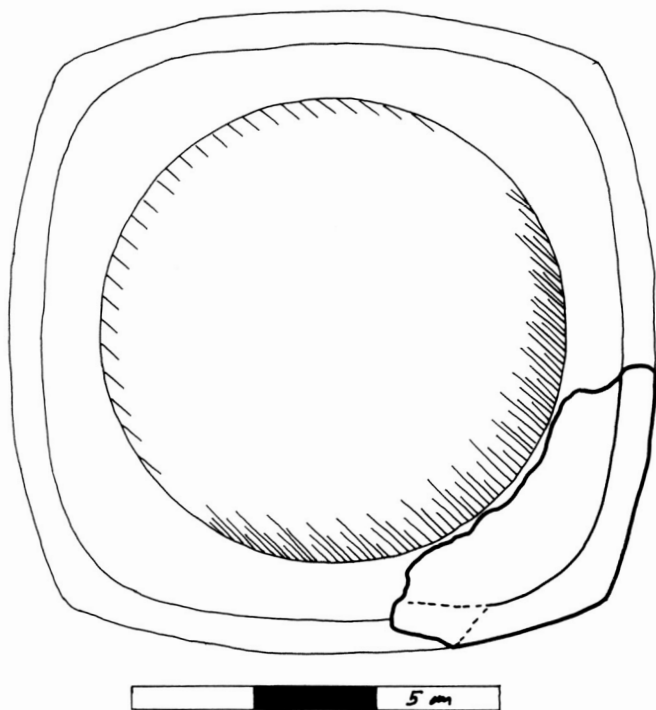


Plate 3. Top view of the stand as reconstructed. Drawing by the author.