

CHAPTER SIX

A LION-HEADED RHYTON FROM THE OPHEL

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A fragment of a lion-headed rhyton was discovered during the 2012 excavation season at the Ophel, in an Iron Age IIA fill (B6475, L12-782). However, it is important to note that, since most earth fills from that period in the Ophel contain pottery and small finds from previous periods (Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age I), the rhyton fragment could belong to an earlier time (Fig. III.6.1).

DISCUSSION

Description

Although only a fragment of the rhyton survived, the sculpted nose is almost complete and is clearly that of a lion. It is made of light peach clay, with a gray core containing abundant small, white grit. No signs of paint were found on the fragment. The nostrils are marked by two slits and the lion's hair is depicted by incisions. On the nose, the hair is depicted by 13 horizontal incisions set in two lines, while along its base it is represented by 19 vertical incisions. To date, all Iron Age lion-headed ceramic rhyta found in Israel are associated with the Philistines (Stern 2006:388; Ben-Shlomo 2008:34).

Parallels

Lion-headed rhyta have been uncovered at several sites in Israel, including Tel Zeror, Tell es-Safi/Gath, Megiddo, Tel Gerisa, Tel Qasile, Tel Miqne-Ekron, Dor, and Naḥal Pattish. In 2008, a fragment of another lion-headed rhyton was found at the summit of the City of David, adjacent to a Late Bronze Age wall located beneath the infrastructure of the 10th century BCE Stepped Stone Structure (Karlin and Mazar 2015). The rhyta found in Israel, all with only one handle, were used as drinking or libation cups. However, unlike classic Greek rhyta, they do not have an actual opening in the lion's mouth (Dothan 1982:229).

Dothan divides the rhyta into two stylistic groups. The first group is fashioned in a naturalistic style, characterized by closed mouths and delicate features. Examples of this style of rhyta were found in Zeror, Megiddo, and Safi (*ibid.*, Pls. 13–15), the one from the summit of the City of David probably belonging to this type as well. The second group is fashioned in a cruder, less naturalistic style, characterized by bulging eyes and cheeks, as well as open mouths showing the tongue and fangs (*ibid.*, p. 229). Examples of this kind of rhyta were found in Tel Gerisa and Tel Qasile (*ibid.*, Pls. 16–17), and recently also in the Ophel. While the



Fig. III.6.1. Rhyton from the Ophel, found in an Iron Age IIA fill (B6475, L12-782).

City of David rhyton belongs to the first group of delicate, naturalistically fashioned rhyta, the Ophel rhyton belongs to the second group, fashioned in a more grotesque and less naturalistic style.

Origins

Both the naturalistic and crude-style rhyta groups bear red and black painted decorations on a whitish slip, often with geometric patterns in a classic Philistine fashion. The designs are rendered in such a manner as to emphasize the lion's features (Dothan 1982:229; Stern 2006:387). As mentioned above, the Ophel rhyton is not painted, leading to question whether it is of Philistine origin or if it follows a different tradition. As for the fragment from the summit of the City of David, its small size makes it impossible to ascertain whether it was originally painted or not.

The incisions on the Ophel rhyton bring to mind the facial features of the Late Bronze Age Canaanite lion rhyta discovered in Ugarit and the ram rhyton found in Mikhomoret, both unpainted. Zevulun points out that the Canaanite clay animal-headed cups from Ugarit and Mikhomoret are very similar, in artistic style and form, to the straight-necked cups found in Iron Age Philistine contexts. She believes that the style of the Philistine rhyta directly follows that of the well-established Canaanite tradition, but replaces the typically used incisions with painted lines (Zevulun 1987:95–99, 101–102). It is therefore possible that the Ophel rhyton represents a throwback to the earlier Canaanite tradition that used incised rather than painted decorations. Meiberg agrees with Zevulun in that the features seen on Iron Age Philistine lion-headed cups should be traced back to Late Bronze Age examples from northern Syria, rather than to the Aegean world. However, she believes that the Late Bronze Age lion-headed cups from Ugarit have roots in Minoan and Mycenaean prototypes (Meiberg 2013:141–142).

Petrographic Results

The petrographic analysis of the Ophel rhyton was performed by David Ben-Shlomo (see Chapter III.7). The analysis showed that the rhyton was made of Moza clay and dolomite sand (Aminadav formation) from the Jerusalem area. This fact further supports the hypothesis that the Ophel rhyton was not of Philistine origin, as suggested by its style and form. In contrast, the petrographic analysis of the City of David rhyton, also carried out by Ben-Shlomo, showed it originated in the Shephelah region, thus strengthening the probability of it being of Philistine origin (Ben-Shlomo 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The Canaanite-style rhyton found in the Ophel, together with the Philistine(?) rhyton from the summit of the City of David, fit in well within the culture of ancient Jerusalem during the last centuries of the second millennium BCE, transitioning into the Early Iron Age IIA (10th century BCE). The City of David rhyton may indicate that the Philistine impact made some inroads into Israel, though widespread influence is not supported by the evidence. At the same time, however, during the Early Iron Age IIA, local Canaanite/Jebusite culture still dominated Jerusalem and continued to influence its people until later in the 10th century BCE, when the Israelite culture became dominant.

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