

YHWH OF SAMARIA? — GRAMMAR AND RELIGION INTERSECT



In 1975-76 excavations at a site called Kuntillet 'Ajrud (also known as Horvat Teiman) in the Sinai, about 55 miles northwest of Eilat, produced a startling inscription.

The fragment from a storage jar (pictured at left, *WSRP*; line-drawing below from Meshel 1978) includes three drawn figures and two lines of text at the top, dating to the first half of the 8th century B.C.E.

The figures drawn on the fragment appear to represent two standing males and a seated female, playing the lyre. Based on the accompanying text (see below), identifications of the two standing figures have ranged from Yhwh and his consort 'Asherah (oddly depicted with male genitalia, or is that a tail?), to Yhwh accompanied by the Egyptian god Bes (common among Syro-Phoenician iconography), or even to two versions of Bes.



The seated figure has been identified as an unnamed female lyre-player or the goddess 'Asherah. If any of the figures were to be identified as Yhwh, it would constitute the only pictorial representation of the Hebrew deity.

Some scholars have suggested that the drawing and writing go together, while others have noted that the thickness of the lines suggest that at the very least a different pen was used for the two parts. The issue remains unresolved.

The inscribed text presents both grammatical and religious curiosities in itself.

אמר א-- הב אמר ליהליו וליעשה ול-- ברכת אתכמ ליהוה שמרנ לאשתרה

'A-- said: Say to Yehalyaw and Yaw'asah and ---, "I bless you

by Yhwh of Samaria and by his 'Asherah"

Two primary issues arise concerning the use of the name יהוה. First, can a proper name be in construct? More specifically, is the name יהוה in construct anywhere in the Hebrew Bible? And second, if the construct analysis is accurate, what does that say about the writer's religious perspective?