

THE DATE OF A BRONZE VASE FROM TELL EN-NAŞBEH

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In the 1947 Tell en Naşbeh site report McCown published a bronze vase found in Cistern 363 (*TN I*:253; Fig. 65; Pl. 53.7; object x78 from Cistern 363; Rockefeller Acc. No. 35.3229; reproduced here as Fig. 1). The vase is ca. 18 cm. tall; its very thin walls taper inwards towards the top of the vessel and then flare slightly outward towards the rim. The published drawing of the vessel shows it with a round, smooth base; the published photograph is too small and dark to discern the vessel's base. However, personal inspection of the vessel, now in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, revealed that the vessel possesses a small carinated button base (Fig. 2). A date of 700–586 or ca. 550 B.C.E. was given to the piece in the 1947 report on the basis of the ceramics and other material found in the cistern (*ibid.*; *TN II*:125). No parallels were cited for this vessel at that time.

In 1982 Stern briefly discussed this piece, calling it an alabastron form (Stern:147; Fig. 242). On the basis of the incorrectly drawn vessel profile and parallels then known from Ur and Deve Hüyük, Stern assigned the Tell en-Naşbeh vase to the Persian period. However, a recent examination of this vessel, along with new discoveries and recent discussions of the development of this vessel type necessitate a fresh appraisal of the Tell en-Naşbeh vase.

This type of bronze vase, or 'beaker,' has a long history. The first specimens, dated to the 10th–9th centuries B.C.E. on stylistic grounds, are decorated with various figurative schemes and have button bases (Muscarella 1974:248; 1988:246). Only one of more than ninety such vessels comes from a controlled excavation, but it is generally believed that they come from Iran with a Babylonian influenced decoration. Plain vases, still with button base, seem to be a later development of the decorated forms. Examples from uncertain contexts are known from Ur and Reijebeh (Woolley 1962:104; Pl. 32: Type 13). Excavated specimens from apparently later Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian contexts, ca. 900–550 B.C.E., come from Nippur (McCown and Haines 1967:76–77, 134; Pl. 108:19), and are especially common at Uruk (Van Ess and Pedde 1992:18–20; Pls. 20–22:118–132). The pieces from Nippur and Uruk all come from double jar burials.

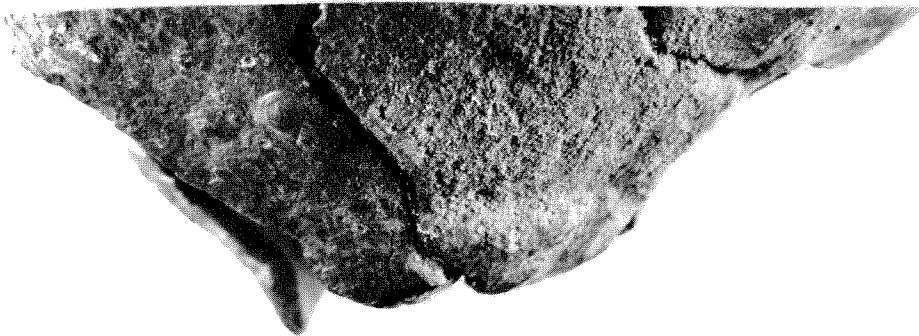
Plain vases without button base seem to be an even later development than the undecorated forms with button base. Four examples are known from Ur; two from Neo-Babylonian buildings, the E-nun-maḥ and the E-gig-par, and two from 'Persian' graves (Woolley 1962:104; Pl. 32: Type 12). A recent study (Braun-Holzinger 1988:123) notes that Woolley's dating of the Ur 'Persian' burials is problematic because little clear external chronological evidence was presented. It is

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Scale 2:5

Fig. 1. Bronze vase from Tell en-Naşbeh as published in *TN I*: Fig. 65:1.



0 1cm.

Fig. 2. Button base of the Tell en-Naşbeh vase.

uncertain whether these graves might not also be Neo-Babylonian, as well as Persian. Two further examples of this type of vase are known from Deve Hüyük in Syria (Woolley 1914–1916: Pl. XXI:15; Moorey 1980:40; Fig. 7:124–125). Although Woolley originally assigned the Deve Hüyük material to the period from 600–300 B.C.E. (Woolley 1914–1916:128), in a later treatment he assigned the cemetery to the 7th–6th centuries B.C.E. (Woolley 1962:104). Moorey continues to assign them to the Persian period (1980:7–10). Since these Deve Hüyük vessels were not attributed to specific graves, they are thus isolated objects of uncertain provenance.

The context in which the Tell en-Naşbeh vase was found is also an important factor in its dating. The mouth of cistern 363 was enclosed by several courses of stones and the mouth itself was found sealed with stones (*TN I*: Pl. 45:1). This cistern is located in Room 617 which is part of Building 141.06 of Stratum 3 (Zorn 1993a:636–639). In the revised stratigraphy of Tell en-Naşbeh, Stratum 3 went out of use ca. 586 B.C.E. so that the larger, better constructed buildings of Stratum 2 (the Babylonian to Persian periods) could be built (*ibid.*:154–156, 161–162; Zorn 1993b:1099–1102). Indeed, none of the ceramics found in the cistern require a date later than the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (*TN I*: Figs. 28C:31–41; 28D:1–18; 29A:1–30; Pls. 52:9–17; 53:1–7).

In Mesopotamia and Syria this type of bronze vessel has usually been found in funerary contexts and only rarely elsewhere. The reason for its presence in Cistern 363 in a typical Iron Age house at Tell en-Naşbeh in the hill country of Judah is unknown. It cannot be determined if it was a prestige item belonging to the resident of this house, or if it was originally used in a completely different context and only later came to be hidden away in this cistern. However, the vessel's button base and context do demonstrate that it is a later Iron Age form, and not Persian as Stern suggested.

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