

A FAIENCE AMULET FROM ROSH HA-‘AYIN, MIZPE AFEQ

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Among the finds from the excavation directed by Haddad (this volume) at Rosh Ha-‘Ayin was a badly preserved faience amulet, representing the Egyptian deity Shu/Heh (Fig. 1). The amulet was found in a context dated to the fourth century BCE.

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Material: White, friable faience core with remains of a greenish-blue glaze on surfaces.

Preserved Dimensions: H 32 mm, W 23 mm, Th 14 mm.

Technique: Mold-made.

Description: The fragment features a human head with a three-part wig and a divine beard. On top of the wig are the remains of what appears to be the sun disc. Partly preserved is the deity's upraised right arm. The space

between the arm and the head is filled in (Fig. 1:a). The figure has a pierced pillared back, indicating that the amulet would have been worn as a pendant (Fig. 1:b, c).

Discussion

Amulets similar to the Rosh Ha-‘Ayin one were identified by Herrmann (1994:231–235; 2002:16–18, 131–132) as the air god Shu. However, in a later publication, Herrmann's identification is less certain and the deity is referred to as “Shu or Heh”, Heh being one of the primordial gods that formed part of the Egyptian Ogdoad (Herrmann 2006:88–92). From these better-preserved examples, it is possible to conclude that the Rosh Ha-‘Ayin amulet, in its complete condition, would have depicted a kneeling human-shaped deity with

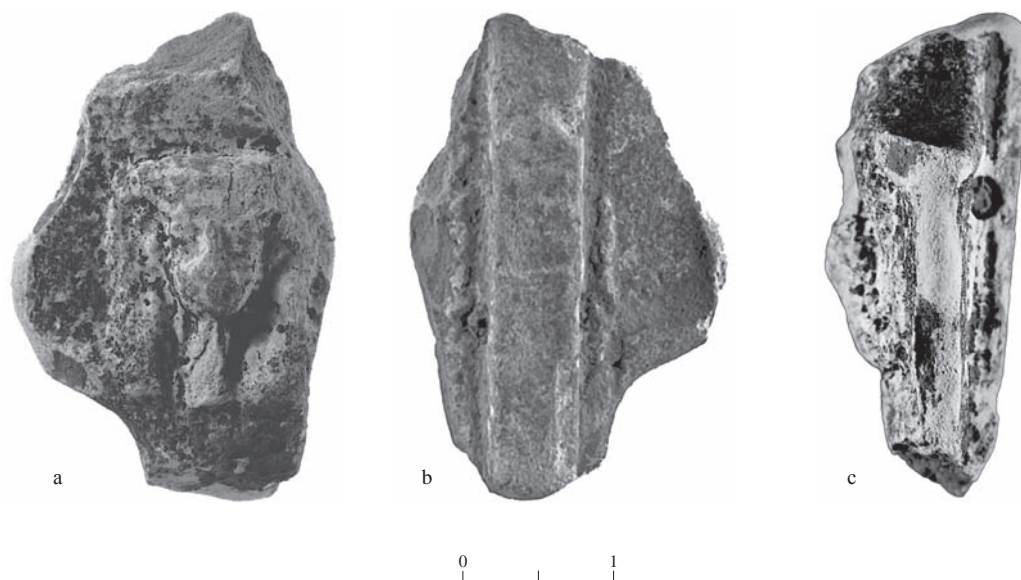


Fig. 1. Faience amulet from Rosh Ha-‘Ayin: (a) front, (b) back, (c) profile.

upraised arms. It is noteworthy that the full dimensions of the Rosh Ha-‘Ayin amulet must have been greater than all the complete Shu/Heh amulets published by Herrmann (1994:231–235; 2002:16–18, 131–132; 2006:88–92), which range in height between 10 and 39.5 mm, and in width between 8 and 28 mm.

Amulets in the shape of gods were worn to place the wearer under the protection of the deity, to access the deity’s particular powers or characteristics, or simply to ward off evil spirits (Andrews 1994:15; Stern 1994:109). They formed part of the popular cult practiced throughout the Levant and, consequently, Egyptian amulets may have been worn regardless of the cultural affiliation of the carrier (Stern 1994:109). Still, it is noteworthy that, of the 25 amulets representing Shu/Heh that are of known provenance in Israel, the two largest groups come from Phoenician contexts: 14 from Dor and 8 from ‘Atlit (Herrmann 1994:229, 232–235; 2006:24, 90; Stern 1994:176–178). In addition, one was discovered in the coastal city of Ashqelon (Herrmann 1994:232) and another, in a tomb

at Akhziv (Dayagi-Mendels 2002:144). The only one not discovered at a coastal site comes from Tell Jemmeh in the northwestern Negev (Herrmann 1994:231).

The time span for the Shu/Heh amulets discovered in Israel reaches from Iron Age IIc (Tell Jemmeh) to the Hellenistic period (two examples from ‘Atlit), with the majority dating to the Persian period (Herrmann 1994:231). The find from Rosh Ha-‘Ayin, which was discovered in a Persian–Hellenistic context, fits soundly within this date range. In Egypt (Andrews 1994:19), some crude examples of this type of Shu amulet have been found in burials from the Third Intermediate period (1069–702 BCE), whereas well-modeled examples have been dated to Dynasty XXVI (664–525 BCE), thus corresponding well with the finds from Israel.

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