

A LEAD AMULET OF NEFERTEM FROM TEL MIKHAL (TEL MICHAL)

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A lead amulet representing the Egyptian god Nefertem (*nfrtm*) was found in Area C1, L708, very close to the edge of the northern hill.¹ The locus consisted of a fill over what seems to be a small circular Persian-period shrine (Gorzalczany and Gestoso Singer 2004). The figurine (B7029; Fig. 1; see Shalev and Sari, this volume), cast in lead of poor quality, measures 4.5 cm high and weighs 12.8 g. This figurine depicts the god in his most typical human form with the divine braided beard, commonly found as a votive statuette. He stands with his left leg forward, but the right leg is broken off at the thigh. He wears a long kilt and has a lotus flower as a crown with a uraeus. This figurine has a loop at the back, which indicates that it was worn as an amulet.

Nefertem is well attested, appearing in royal funerary texts as early as the Old Kingdom (Pyramid Texts; Sethe 1908:§266). There he is depicted as the God of the Primeval Lotus and is called "The lotus blossom which is at the nose of Ra", probably an allusion to the display of this scented flower by banquet

guests (Hornung 1971:185, 280–282). Another epithet, also associated with the lotus, is "Lord of the Perfumes"; since the lotus, together with other unguents, was part of the mummification process and therefore a symbol of eternal life and rebirth (Schlögl 1982:378–380). Other names are "Perfect in beauty", "Good is Atum", "Watcher at the nostrils of Ra" and "The one who is perfect in being or not being".

Two traditions existed explaining his origins. In the first, according to Egyptian mythology, Nefertem was born from the lotus flower on an island raised from the primeval sea, Nun. Thus, his main attribute was the lotus flower, which links him to perfumes, pleasant fragrances, precious unguents and rebirth. Ra was often depicted holding a lotus flower to his nose too, since both Ra and Nefertem sprang from the sacred lotus floating upon the waters of Nun. In the Memphite Triad, the second tradition, Nefertem was regarded as the son of Ptah and his consort, the lioness goddess Sekhmet, and is called "Atum" or "Ra the younger" (Shabaka Stone; Lichtheim 1973:54).

Iconographically, Nefertem appears in several ways: as a human standing alone; standing on a lion (in a Dynasty XXVI Saite context; Setton-Williams 1965:14); as a human holding a lotus flower (Petrie 1914:38, Pl. XXX:175a–f); as a human wearing a lotus flower as a crown with two plumes and two necklaces (symbols of fertility). Another, less common version (not found in amulet form), depicts him as a lion-headed human wearing a headdress composed of a lotus flower, two plumes and two menats (virility symbols).

In Israel, twelve Nefertem amulets have been found. The earliest three date to Iron IIA, and

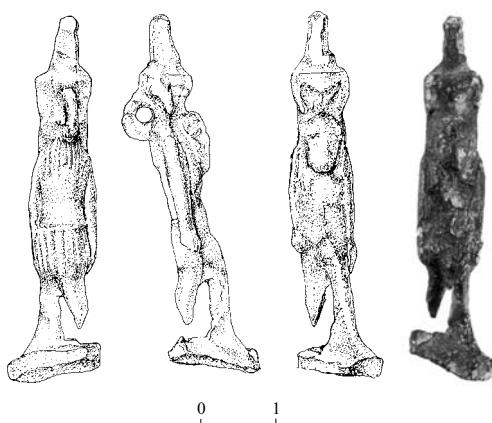


Fig. 1. The amulet of Nefertem.

come from Tel Far'ah (South) (Petrie 1930: Pl. XLIII:505), Bet She'an (Herrman 1994:241) and Tel Lakhish (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 35:38). Four from Iron IIB contexts were found at Tel Lakhish (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 35:39), Akhziv (Herrmann 1994:245), Bet Shemesh (Mackenzie 1912–13: Pl. XXVIII:3; Herrmann 1994:242), Gezer (Macalister 1912:332, Pl. CCX:79) and two at Megiddo (Lamon and Shipton 1939:120, Pl. 76:3; Herrmann 1994:244–245). In Persian-period strata, one was found at Ashqelon and one at Tel Gemme (Herrmann 1994:245–246).² These were carved in several sorts of glazed material. Nefertem amulets now in the Turin, Switzerland, Cairo and St. Petersburg collections are made of gold, silver, bronze

and lapis lazuli, as well as violet, blue, green and yellow faience (Herrmann 1994:243–246; 2002:135–136).

The presence of a figurine representing an Egyptian divinity dating to the Persian period is further evidence that foreign merchants (Egyptian or Phoenician) were active at Tel Mikhal (Herzog 1989:112–113). These merchants presumably used anchorage facilities available at Tel Mikhal or its surroundings (Grossman 1990:46). Since no seaport has been discovered at the site, it is quite possible that during the Persian period some kind of coastal transport system (vessel to shore, probably using rowboats) existed at Tel Mikhal, or nearby in the estuary of the Gelilot River.³

NOTES

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² The amulet from Tel Far'ah (South), was found in a Dynasty XXII context (Petrie 1930: Pl. XLIII:505). The ones at Bet Shemesh (Mackenzie 1912–13: Pl. XXVIII:3) and at Gezer (Macallister 1912:332, Pl. CCX:79), and two at Tel Lakhish (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 35, 38, 39) have good parallels in Italy (Hölbl 1986: Pls. 8:1a–5b; 9:1a–b). One more broken amulet identified as Nefertem was retrieved at Be'er Sheva', in a Late Iron Age/Persian-period context (Singer-Avitz 1999: Fig. 13:8).

³ For a survey on seamanship and port installations along the coastline of Israel during the different historical periods see: Galili, Dahari and Sharvit 1993; Galili and Sharvit 1994.

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