Astarte

1. Introduction. West Semitic goddess, →DDD. A. is an elusive figure in the 2nd mill. Ugaritic myths (WYATT 1999: 110). Like →Anat, she is a warrior and huntress (NIEHR 1998: 34f; CAT 1.92) and closely related to →Baal by the phrase “Astarte-name-of-Baal” (CAT 1.16 VI 56). The warrior iconography of A. is comparable to that of the Mesopotamian goddess →Ishtar (COLBOW 1991) with whom she is identified, e.g., in the Ugaritic pantheon lists (NIEHR 1998: 34, 52).

In Egypt A. is connected with war and →horses. As the daughter of →Ptah she had a temple at Memphis and appears in the “Astarte papyrus” (COS 1.23). At Late Bronze Emar she plays a dominant role as the main goddess and consort of Baal (FLEMING 1992: 216ff). In the 1st mill. she is the chief goddess of Tyre and the consort of Baal. Together with →Eshmun she is also the patron of Sidon, where she had a temple (KAI no. 14: 17-18). The exact relationship with →Tannit of Carthage is not clear. One inscription cites A. and Tannit of Lebanon (KAI no. 81), another mentions A.-Tannit (BONNET 1996: no. E2). In the Hebrew Bible the name occurs nine times, often in the phrase “Baals and Astartes” (e.g., Judg 2:13) to refer negatively to the “Canaanite” deities. The armor of slain king Saul was hung on the wall of her temple at Beth-Shean (1 Sam 31:10). A. was later combined with Anat to become the Phoenician goddess Atargatis (→IDD 2); classical authors identified her with Aphrodite.

Only a single cylinder seal is known (1*) from Palestine/Israel, which is inscribed with her name, while Egypt attests ten objects from the New Kingdom with her name (CORNELIUS 2008: 90). Fragments from Saqqarah (4*) are interpreted as showing A. and not Anat. Although the name “Astarte” appears on the Winchester stela (→Qudshu 2*), the iconography is that of the →Nude goddess holding plants and →serpents. Late Bronze Palestinian plaques of a naked woman are often called “Astarte” plaques (e.g., ALBRIGHT 1939 and still TUBB 1998: 75). There has been a recent trend to interpret them as representations of Asherah (e.g., DAY 1992: 494). However, the type might be identified with →Qudshu 4*, 12-14* instead.

The main problem lies in distinguishing between representations of A. and Anat, since the iconography of the two goddesses is very similar in the Late Bronze Age. Both are armed and wear the atef crown (→Crown [Egypt]). Since both Anat and A. are “smiting goddesses,” the Levantine bronze “smiting” figurines may represent both. Only one bronze figurine labeled with “Astarte” is known (10*); it is the only bronze figurine of a goddess with a name known thus far.

Stelae from Egypt with the name of A. link her with horses (LECLANT 1960 and now CORNELIUS 2008: 40ff). Although her name occurs in various forms (CORNELIUS 2008: 81-83), there is no doubt as to the reading of and identification with A. (WEIPPERT 1997: 25ff). There is also no need to create a new goddess, as is sometimes done (e.g., STADELMANN 1967: 99). As with →Resheph, A. is linked with horses in Egyptian (CORNELIUS 2008: 43) and Ugaritic texts (CAT 1.86). Other images of a woman on horseback on seal-amulets (22*) may also be identified with A. and not with Anat (contra LIPIŃSKI 1996: 262, who proposed Anat because of the wings).

Excluded here are items sometimes connected with riding A., which could also represent Resheph (CORNELIUS 1994: 82ff with pls. 24, 26-27; RR35-38; CORNELIUS 2008: 41). RR37 is uncertain because the reconstruction is not clear: the inscription mentions Resheph, but A. could be represented just as well. RR36 and RR35 represent either Resheph or A. on horseback and in a chariot, respectively (see in addition also CORNELIUS 2008: 26, Cat 1.6). RR35 does not show a bearded face (see now CORNELIUS 2008: fig. 27b).

The name on the Abu Simbel stela (6*) is to be read as “Astarte” and not as Asherah as proposed by HERRMANN (1999: 93), as the latter played no role in Egypt.

It has been argued (DECKER 1971: 35ff) that in some cases the riding figure is the pharaoh (→King [Egypt]) and not a deity. However, cases where the name is indicated leave no doubt about the identification. In other cases the atef crown and shield and the fact that the figure is female indicate that the king is excluded (14*; CORNELIUS 2008: pl. 4:1-2, 4).

Two items from Palestine/Israel depict a naked woman standing (not riding) on horseback and holding objects. One, a golden foil from Lachish (→Qudshu 9*), shows the woman holding large lotus flowers; while the other, a clay mold from the Beth-Shean valley (→Qudshu 8*), pictures her holding flowers and flanked by two smaller male figures. These items have been linked with A. (CLAMER 1980; HADLEY 2000: 163; WEIPPERT 1988: 303, 305) because of the horse. However, the
overall iconography is unlike that of the armed and aggressive A., despite the presence of a horse. The naked figure should be viewed as Qudshu instead.

An ivory panel from Ugarit depicting a horned and winged goddess suckling two boys (CORNELIUS 2008: 37-39, 115f, Cat 3.11) is traditionally identified with Anat because the latter is portrayed as being winged in the Ugaritic texts. CAT II.1.27 describes how the new king (→King [ANE]) will be suckled by Athirat (Asherah) and btlt (which is usually a title for Anat). However, the identification of btlt with Anat is not certain (WYATT 2002: 209). Recently GREENSTEIN (1998: 110f) proposed a reading of “Astarte” for the name of Athirat, based on new photographs of the text and the fact that the young boys represent princes, not gods, who would be suckled by the younger generation of goddesses like A. rather than Athirat. Identification remains problematic. Because A. is connected with the herds of Deut 7:13; 28:4, 18 (DELCOR 1974), the goddess feeding goats on an ivory pyxis from Ugarit (CORNELIUS 2008: 33f, 110f, Cat 2.7) has been linked with A. (e.g., POPE-RÖLLIG 1965: 251). However, Asherah has also been considered as a possibility (NIEHR 1998: 29). There are also no conclusive reasons to argue (see GESE 1970: 159) that the figure standing on lions on a cylinder seal from Ugarit (CORNELIUS 2008: 31, 108, Cat 2.2) and the naked winged figure on a Hebrew name seal (KEEL/UEHLINGER 1998: fig. 331a) depict A.

Faience figurines with the atef crown (contra HERRMANN 1994: nos. 151-153) could be Anat but could just as likely be A., as both wear the same type of crown.

On cylinder seal 1* from Bethel, the name of A. written in hieroglyphs is flanked by one male and one female figure. WEIPPERT (1988: 308), followed by KEEL/UEHLINGER (1998: 87f n. 28, fig. 109), proposed identifying the woman holding the spear with Anat, while the written name marks the presence of A. In my opinion this seal should rather be identified as an object devoted to A. (therefore the name), who is depicted visually together with her consort Baal.

A horned figure found at Gezer (CORNELIUS 2008: 36, fig. 23) is sometimes identified as the Asherot Qarnayim of Gen 14:5. However, the latter is rather to be taken as a place name (ASTOUR 1992: 491; Asherot near Qarnayim) and not as “Astarte of the two Horns.” A stela from Beth-Shean (CORNELIUS 2008: 34, 112, Cat 3.2) is sometimes taken to be A. because of 1 Sam 31:10 (see above). However, this identification is highly debatable and the figure may just as well be that of Anat, who is depicted on another stela from the same site, inscribed with her name (→Anat 1*). On the stela from Ba'al’u’a it is uncertain whether the woman (CORNELIUS 2008: 35, 112, Cat 3.3) is A. as the consort of the Moabite god →Chemosh.

The woman on the stela dedicated by Yehawmilk (BONNET 1996: 19ff, pl. 2) is described as the “Lady of Byblos.” She is more of the →Hathor-Isis type (BONNET 1996: pl. 3:1) than a representation of A.

Whether A. has been depicted theriomorphically is not clear. The dove (→Bird) is often taken as a symbol of A. This may be true of the Greek Aphrodite, but is not certain as far as A. is concerned (BONNET 1996: 152f; HELCK 1971: 273). WARD (1992: 75) dealt with the →cow-and-calf motif. Whether this can be linked with A. or Tannit instead is also uncertain. The sphinx seems to be connected with A. more easily, as the latter is linked with sphinx →thrones (GUBEL 1983: 43). Thrones of A. (DELCOR 1983) are known, such as a 3rd/2nd cent. example from near Tyre (BONNET 1996: 40f, pl. 5) with two stelae on the back, one showing the worshipper and the other the goddess (?) Another comes from the Eshmun temple at Sidon, dated to the 6th-3rd. cent. (PARROT 1975: figs. 109, 116). The fact that A. is shown as lion-headed on a Ptolemaic Edfu relief (CORNELIUS 2008: 43, fig. 32) does not necessarily mean that all images of a female deity connected to lions should be linked with A., as for example done by GRAY (1962). RACHMANI (1959) connected a presumed lion-headed plaque figure with A. because of the lion face, but the lioness features are perhaps due to an accident when the figure was pulled out of the mold (TADMOR 1982: 157 n. 15) rather than originally intended.

**II. Typology**

**II.1. Phenotypes**

1. **Standing**

1.1. Armed. Three items depict A. holding weapons. In the case of cylinder 1* from Bethel it is a spear (for the identification of the goddess with A. see the discussion in § 1). Her male consort in juxtaposition holds an identical weapon so that both figures flank an inscription. On a damaged stela from Memphis (2) A. holds weapons in front of her. The headress is

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Iconography of Deities and Demons: Electronic Pre-Publication
Last Revision: 12 August 2008

3/7
damaged. A relief in the temple at Hibis dating to the Persian Period (3*) shows A. twice with the Egyptian red crown (→Crown [Egypt]) and holding weapons: a bow, and a bow with arrows and a quiver.

1.2. Menacing. VAN SICILEN (1991) reconstructed from fragments figure 4*, wearing an atef crown (→Crown [Egypt]) and holding a weapon menacingly (for the posture see →Resheph § II) above the head. In the other hand she holds a curved shield with a spear; behind the figure a sun shade is depicted, which was a symbol of protection. The inscribed name of the figure is reconstructed as reading A. by VAN SICILEN (see CORNELIUS 2008: 23, 81).

1.3. Holding a scepter. A woman in a long dress is shown together with other Egyptian deities on in situ items at Tura (5) and Abu Simbel (6*). In the first case she is described as “Astarte foremost of Memphis.” In their left hands the women respectively hold a was scepter (→Scepter [Egypt]) and a scepter which is more of the pluriform type, and in each right hand the Egyptian symbol for life. On a stela in the Louvre (7) the upper part of the object which she holds is damaged, but it resembles a scepter more than a spear.

1.4. Blessing. An 8th cent. Phoenician bronze figurine (8*) shows a female figure (not male as in MOSCATI 2001: 33) with the headdress of →Hathor. One hand is held in a gesture of blessing, the other hand is empty but may have held a staff (but not a weapon because of the peaceful gesture). Because of the gesture of blessing of bronze figurine 10*, which is dedicated to A., item 8* is also taken to represent her.

1.5. Winged. A scarab from Acco (9*) features three anthropomorphic figures. The female figure on the left wears a skirt and has two wings. Because the figure in the center is clearly the Egyptian god →Ptah, whose daughter was A., the woman is identified accordingly (LIPIŃSKI 1996: 257 proposed →Anat because of the wings).

2. Seated

2.1. Blessing. The only female bronze figurine with the name of A. is 10*. It shows a seated (but with the seat missing), naked female with long hair, which is held by a hand. The left arm is lost but the other hand is in a position of blessing. The Phoenician inscription dedicates the object to A. (BONNET 1996: 161: no. O 2). A relief from Tyre (11) also shows a seated figure with a raised hand, which may depict A. as chief goddess of Tyre.

2.2. Holding a tree. On a scarab a long-haired woman, wearing a divine Hathor headdress composed of a disc and cow horns, is shown seated on the ab sign (12*). She is holding a fenestrated battle axe resting on her left shoulder, and holds a tree in the other hand. There are crude hieroglyphic signs without meaning. Above her head there is a disc in a crescent. A figure on a sphinx throne also holds a tree and the other hand is in a gesture of blessing (13). The exact male parallel has been identified with →Baalshamem (→Baalshamem #: NIEHR 2003: 83f, fig. 9).

3. Equestrian

3.1. Menacing. Egyptian reliefs, stelae, and ostraca depict a female figure on horseback (CORNELIUS 2008: 117-119, Cat 4.1-4.7; for the relationship of A. and the horse see § 1). Four of these stelae (CORNELIUS 2008: 82) have hieroglyphic inscriptions which identify the figure as A. and leave no doubt that the equestrian figure is A. The example illustrated here (14*) shows her brandishing a weapon menacingly above her head while the other hand holds a small shield with a spear in front. She is wearing a white crown (→Crown [Egypt]) with a streamer, while her horse’s head is decorated with plumes. A recently discovered Egyptian stela at Tell el-Borg (Sini) inscribed with the name of A. depicts menacing A. seated on a throne resting on the horse’s back. She wears an atef crown with horns and holds a curved shield together with a spear. On her left is menacing →Resheph with a raised weapon and curved shield (15*). Another menacing figure on horseback is depicted on a painted ostracon (16). The woman is riding astride, waving a bow (?) above the head and holding the horse by a bridle. The hair is in a ponytail (?) and she is wearing a heart amulet around the neck. Equestrian female figures to be identified with A. are also shown on seal-amulets, including a cylinder seal (17), a Phoenician cup (18*), and a scarab (19*). The woman on 17 is riding sidesaddle and holds a shield in front, while those of 19* hold the horse by its neck. Behind the horse rider there is a sun shade and some unidentifiable hieroglyphic signs.

3.2. Armed. On a damaged stela (20) A. is depicted on horseback, pulling her bow and pursuing a fleeing Kushite. In the scene there is a winged disc (→Winged disc [Egypt]) above and a sun shade (see 19*) behind her. The reins of the horse are depicted over her body. At the temple of Hibis dating to the Persian Period she is likewise shown armed on horseback (3*).

3.3. Unarmed. An unarmed figure on horseback is shown on a series of scarabs from the Michaelides collection. The figure

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wears an atef crown and the arms are either hanging down along the body (21*) or transformed into wings (22*). This figure was previously connected with winged →Baal-Seth (CORNELIUS 1994: 209), but following the criticism of LIPINSKI (1996: 262) this identification is no longer upheld (CORNELIUS 2008: 44). However, identifying these figures with →Anat merely because of the wings is also not convincing. Because of the clear equestrian iconography of A., these figures should be identified with her.

II.2. Associations

1. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES/DEMONS 1.1. Ptah (2, 5, 9) 1.2. Resheph (3, 9, 15) 1.3. Seth (6-7) 1.4. Amun-Re (6, 9) 1.5. Other (1, 5-6) 2. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS 2.1. Horse (3, 14-22) 2.2. Other (17-18) 3. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS 3.1. Pharaoh (2, 4-7, 14) 3.2. Enemy (19-20)

1. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES

1.1. Ptah. A. is associated several times with →Ptah of Memphis. She may stand behind the shrine in which Ptah is placed (2), face him as “daughter of Ptah” (9*), or be part of a procession of deities led by Ptah (5).

1.2. Resheph. On the Hibis temple reliefs (3*) A. is shown in a procession of Egyptian deities, among them →Resheph holding knives. A scaraboid from Acco (9*) depicts Resheph with a tasseled kilt and a quiver in company with Ptah and A. and a recently discovered stela (15*) from Tell el-Borg represents him with a raised weapon and a shield facing equestrian A.

1.3. Seth. Anthropomorphic as well as theriomorphic, Seth can be associated with A. In the upper register of stela 7 theriomorphic Seth is depicted as a reclining sphinx; A. is below him. In a procession of deities on a rock relief from Abu Simbel (6*), A. is the last deity in the row with anthropomorphic Seth striding in front of her.

1.4. Amun-Re. In anthropomorphic form Amun-Re is depicted in front of the procession of deities mentioned in the previous paragraph (6*). In the case of 9* the ram and disc on the left are understood as representing Amun-Re (with KEEL 1997: 530).

1.5. Other. Deities less frequently associated with A. include her consort, the menacing god Baal (1*), and members of processions of deities including →Osiris, →Sakhmet, →Hathor (5), and →Nut (6*).

2. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS

2.1. Horse. The animal most frequently associated with A. is the →horse, on which the goddess rides (3*, 14*-22*).

2.2. Other. Equestrian A. is shown together with other animals: two →lions, a →caprid, and a →bull (17). Cup 18* depicts attacking lions and the rider chasing antelopes.

3. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS

3.1. Pharaoh. A. appears with the Egyptian pharaohs (→King [Egypt]) Amenophis II (5; 1426-1400); Ramses II (1279-1213; 4*, 7, 14*; Merenptah (2; 1213-1204); and Siptah (6*; 1198-1193).

3.2. Enemy. A. is chasing a Kushite enemy (20); when shown on horseback as a menacing figure there is a fallen enemy beneath the horse (19*).

III. Sources

III.1. Chronological range. The oldest inscribed item (5) stems from the fourth year of Amenophis II (1426-1400). However, most representations date to the 14th-12th cent. (3*, 9*, 15*, 19*-20*), of which the majority belong to the 13th cent. (1*-2, 4*, 6*-7, 14*, 16, 22*). The bronze figurines 8* and 10* belong to a smaller group comprising the 8th-7th cent. (see also 12*-13). Cup 18* dates to the 8th-6th, and 11 and 3* extend into the Persian Period. Representations of A. continue into the Roman Period (→IDD 2).

III.2. Geographical distribution.

Items range from the Sudan (14*) to Spain (10*). Cylinder seal 1* is from Bethel in Palestine/Israel. Items 16 (perhaps from Thebes) and 20 (presumably from Deir el-Medina) come from Egypt. The temples of Hibis (3*) contain a relief and two stelae are in situ: 5 in the quarries of Tura but presumably now lost, and 6* at Abu Simbel. A Phoenician cup (18*) comes from near Byblos and relief 11 from Tyre.

III.3. Object types. Depictions of A. are found on all types of media, from stelae (2, 4*, 6*-7, 14*-15*, 20) and reliefs (3*, 5, 11) to bronze figurines (8*, 10*), a cup (18*), seal-amulets (9*, 12*-13, 17, 19*, 21*-22*), and even ostraca (16). The blessing figures are executed as bronze figurines (8*, 10*) or on a relief (11). The unarmed figure on horseback (21*-22*) never occurs on stelae or ostraca.

IV. Conclusion.

The functions of the representations range from A. as warrior (1*-4*, 14*-20) to a blessing goddess (8*, 10*-11, 13). On 12* she appears not as an aggressive goddess and the →tree is more a symbol of life; this is also the case with →Baal (→Baal 1*; CORNELIUS 1994: figs. 31a-b; but cf. in contrast CORNELIUS 1994: fig. 31). As shown by GÜBEL (1980: 17) the axe is only an image of power.

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A. is often shown with pharaohs (2, 4*-7, 14*), and like →Anat and Baal was particularly popular with those of the New Kingdom. However, the ostraca and seal-amulets show that she was also popular among the common people (9*, 16-17, 19*, 21*-22*).

From the source material it can be ascertained that A. was a goddess linked to warfare (1*-4*, 14*-20), especially when on horseback, but also a mistress of the hunt (17-18*; —mistress-of-animals). Unfortunately there are not as many clearly identifiable representations from Iron Age Palestine/Israel and the whole of the Levant as one would like due to the lack of inscribed items.

V. Catalogue


VI. Selected Bibliography

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Izak Cornelius
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