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Chapter 14

The Twin-Cup Libation Vessels

Yosef Garfinkel and Michael G. Hasel

14.1. Introduction

Two twin-cup libation vessels were found at Khirbet Qeiyafa, each in a cultic context. The first was found during the 2009 season in a private cultic room, and the second was found during the 2011 season in a public cultic area. The vessels consist of two joined rounded cups on a high base. Each cup has its own opening, but they are also connected to one another. As far as we know, one other such vessel has been uncovered in an Iron Age I site and two others at Iron Age II sites. All five vessels were found in cultic contexts. The fact that all the known exemplars were found in Iron Age sites indicates that this pottery type is an innovation of this era (Figure 14.1).

14.2. The Twin-Cup Libation Vessel from Area C

The twin-cup vessel from Area C (Figure 14.1:a) was found on the floor of Room G in Building C3 (Figure 14.2), the third building east of the gate of Area C (Freikman and Garfinkel 2014:168–184; see also Chapter 2 in this volume for the wider context). Room G was surrounded by four walls and contained a bench (C6178) facing north (Figure 14.3). Finds in Room G include two standing stones, an offering table, a limestone basin, a rounded and a rectangular installation, and a basalt altar (Figure 14.4). A seal and an Egyptian scarab were also found in this room (see Chapter 16). The combination of these architectural elements and objects strongly suggest that this room was used as a private cultic sanctuary within Building C3.

The twin-cup libation vessel was found smashed on Floor C6160 (Basket C8826) near the limestone Basin C6191 located in the southeastern corner of Room G (Figures 14.5–14.6). The vessel has a tall base, 7 cm in height, and its lower part ends with a flared widening edge and measures 7.5 cm in diameter. This base supports two cups, that on the left 10 cm in diameter and that on the right 9.5 cm in diameter. The vessel is complete except for the necks and rims of the two cups (Figure 14.7).

14.3. The Twin-Cup Libation Vessel from Area D

The public cultic sanctuary in Area D was located south of the western gate on the opposite side of the large piazza in Building D100 (Figures 14.8–14.9; Hasel 2014:284–304; see also Chapter 2 in this volume for the wider context). The finds in Room A of the cultic building were significant and provide an indication of the use of this room in relation to the other rooms in Building D100 (Figure 14.10). Surfaces D2395, D2446, D2458, and D2468 were rich in Iron Age IIA pottery (including bowls, storage jars, and a chalice), as well as one knife and three long blades, possibly swords (see Chapter 10). Bench D2299 is close to the find context of the twin-cup vessel in Room J, and benches in other rooms at the site are considered to be indicative of cultic practices. It is possible
that the bench originally extended into Room I, where it would have faced Standing Stone D2462, but that it was shortened in the Late Persian–Early Hellenistic period.

A twin-cup libation vessel (Figure 14.11) was found on Surface D2395 in Room A, just east of Bench D2462 (Basket D4239). The flared base of the vessel measures 7 cm in diameter and 4 cm in height. The cup on the left is 9.5 cm in diameter, while the cup on the right cannot be measured because of its poor preservation. The upper portion of the vessel, comprising the upper parts and necks of the twin cups, is not preserved (Figure 14.1:b). The restored vessel closely resembles the vessel found in the Area C sanctuary room (Figure 14.7). The archaeological contexts of both vessels suggest that they are contemporaneous, both dating from the Iron Age IIA.

14.4. The Wider Context of Twin-Cup Libation Vessels

Three similar pottery libation vessels are known, deriving from Tel Qiri in the Jezreel Valley and Khirbat al-Mudayna and Tell Deir ‘Alla in Jordan. The vessel from Tel Qiri was found in a sanctuary of Stratum VIII, dated to the 11th century BCE.

Chapter 14: The Twin-Cup Libation Vessels

Figure 14.2: Room G, Building C3, Area C.

Figure 14.3: Aerial photograph of Room G, Building C3, Area C, with cultic installations.

Figure 14.4: Drawing of Room G, Building C3, Area C, with cultic installations.
The vessel from Khirbat al-Mudayna in Jordan was found in a sanctuary near the city gate, dated to the 8th century BCE (Figure 14.1:d; Daviau and Steiner 2000, Fig. 11:10). This location is similar to that of the twin-cup vessel from Area D at Khirbet Qeiyafa. The vessel from Tell Deir ʿAlla in Jordan was also unearthed in an 8th century BCE cultic context (Figure 14.1:e, Hoftijzer and van der Kooij 1976, Pl. 16b: center). This vessel type has not been reported from the Canaanite culture of the Late Bronze Age or from Philistine sites of the Iron Age. It has a restricted inland distribution, having been found in the Jezreel Valley at Tel Qiri, in the Judean Shephelah (two samples from Khirbet Qeiyafa), in the Jordan Valley at Tell Deir ʿAlla, and in the Jordanian hills at Khirbat al-Mudayna.

These vessels are connected with libation and indicate that some kind of liquid (water, wine, milk, oil, or blood) was used in the liturgy.
(see Chapter 15). In the biblical tradition, such libation vessels are described by the term נסך, "libation" (e.g., Num 4:7; cf. Haran 1968; Dohmen 1998; Zevit 2001:295–298).

**Figure 14.7:** The libation vessel of Room 6, Building C3, Area C, after restoration (photograph by C. Amit).

**Figure 14.8:** Aerial photograph of the find context of the libation vessel in Room A, Building D100, Area D.
Figure 14.9: Drawing of the find context of the libation vessel in Room A, Building D100, Area D.

Figure 14.10: Drawing of Room A, Building D100, Area D with cultic installations and objects.

Figure 14.11: Close-up of the libation vessel as found in Room A, Building D100, Area D.
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