

PARALLELS TO A RARE DOUBLE-SPOUTED
EARLY ROMAN OIL LAMP FROM TOMB E.6, TELL HESBÂN

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A unique double-spouted Early Roman Oil lamp was found at Tell Hesbân, Jordan, during the 1974 Andrews University/American Schools of Oriental Research Expedition. (See p. 172 for a photograph.) This appears to be the first from the context of controlled stratigraphy.

Located on the western hills across the Wadi el-Majarr from Tell Hesbân is Area E, where a number of Roman/Byzantine rock-hewn tombs can be observed only a short distance southwest from the acropolis. Tomb E.6,¹ a type 2 tomb with a single loculus,² provided two Roman cooking pots and an unusual "Herodian"-type lamp with two spouts and a high central column, previously broken off at the top (handle?). Its color is mottled black-white,³ with each of the two spouts (3 cm. wide) at the opposite ends of the oil reservoir (7 cm. in diameter). The lamp base and central column (2 cm. at the broken top) seem to have been made on a wheel by a potter who used his imagination to include easy suspension from the loop that may have completed the column; the design also had the benefit of doubling the "candle" power with two oil spouts. The lamp is 13 cm. long (nozzle to nozzle) and 9 cm. high.⁴ It was found on bedrock under four soil loci at a depth of 1.31 m., the loci covering the tomb face. The ceramic evidence for each locus ranged from Locus 1, Byzantine, to Locus 4, Early Roman. (Note the ceramic discussion of the Early Roman period.)⁵

¹James H. Stirling, "Heshbon 1974: Areas E, F, and G.10," *AUSS* 14 (1976): 102-103.

²According to the categories of S. Douglas Waterhouse, in "Heshbon 1971: Areas E and F," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 120.

³Munsell chart was unavailable. On the Grumbacher Color Compass Wheel the colors are #1, black; #9, off-white.

⁴The author wishes to thank Mr. Samir Issa Ghishan, of the Madaba Regional Museum, Jordan, for his assistance in providing these measurements.

⁵James A. Sauer, "Heshbon 1971: Area B," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 63-69.

1. *Published Multiple-“Bow-Spouted” Early Roman Lamps*⁶

There are only a few published parallels to the rare Early Roman lamp with two bow-spouts found in Tomb E.6. This situation may be due either to the small number of lamps with multiple spouts discovered thus far, or because the lamps that have been found come from an unknown ceramic context. The paucity of published information regarding these lamps limits the chance of finding evidence of the ceramic development for this innovative style, at least for the present. The existing information on this style of lamp is as follows:

R. H. Smith has described a two- and a four-bow-spouted lamp, both belonging to the Whiting Collection of Palestinian Pottery, Yale University Art Gallery: (a) The design of the lamp with two nozzles is larger than the common one-bow-spouted lamp, often referred to as the “Virgin’s Lamp” or “Herodian Lamp.” Dated to the middle of the first century A.D., it has “extravagant incised decoration”⁷ and two spouts formed, side by side. Both of these attributes make it quite different from the E.6 lamp of Ḥesbân. (b) The closest parallel to the Ḥesbân double-bow-spouted lamp is the second one, described by Smith — Type 29, Number 841:

The latter example is also unique in that it was wheel made in two sections, after which the four nozzles and a loop for suspension were attached. No exact parallel is known, but a wheel made ring lamp in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto exhibits the same manufacturing technique, and our lamp can most probably be dated with it to the second century, B.C.⁸

Further information is given concerning this unusual lamp: “(W772) Grey black ware. Hanging lamp with four nozzles. Wheel made. Hellenistic. D = .145; H = .105.”⁹ In a subsequent study Smith gave additional information for Number 841:

The rare four-spouted Herodian lamp shown on the right in Figure 4 is even more complex, yet manages to convey a pleasing appearance. It is well made of grey ware with a grey-black slip. It was clearly meant to be placed in the center of a room. In designing

⁶Paul W. Lapp, *Palestinian Ceramic Chronology 200 B.C. — A.D. 70*, Archaeology, Vol. 3 (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1961): 25.

⁷Robert Houston Smith, “The Household Lamps of Palestine in New Testament Times,” *BA* 29 (1966): 14.

⁸Robert Houston Smith, “The Development of the Lamp in Palestine,” *Berytus* 14 (1963): 95.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 114.

this lamp the potter surmounted several technical difficulties competently. Since the presence of wicks on all sides of the bowl made carrying difficult, the potter added a tall ring-handle in the center which he joined to the body by a discus. Closing the oil reservoir in this way meant, however, that some means of filling the lamp had to be found, so the potter punched two small filling-holes on opposite sides of the bowl. In order that the oil would run into the holes properly, he depressed the discus sufficiently to form a catch-basin.¹⁰

Smith published a third source in the development of multiple-spouted "Herodian" type lamps and describes a larger ring-shaped lamp, mentioned in his 1963 quotation above. This lamp was first described by Winifred Needler who states:

Lamps with several wicks burned more oil but gave a much brighter light. The large ring-shaped lamp which originally had thirteen nozzles was imported from Greece during the Hellenistic period; the tubular ring which contained its oil was folded into shape and the hand-modelled nozzles, filling funnel and loop handle were then added; marks both on the exterior and on the hollow interior suggest that the walls of the ring were wheel-made.¹¹

The dimensions of this large multiple-spouted Greek lamp are provided. "Diam. of largest (to tip of nozzles) 24.5 cm. (9 5/8 in.)."¹²

2. Unpublished Multiple-"Bow-Spouted" Lamps

Besides the published lamps with multiple bow-spouts, there are others which to date have not appeared in the literature. Two examples can be seen in the Israel Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem. The first is a very large square lamp with twenty-one nozzles. The date and provenance are unknown, but it could be hypothesized that it was made in the late Hellenistic period, as was the lamp described by Needler above. The second is similar to the four-spouted lamp in the Whiting Collection at Yale University Art Gallery described by Smith.

Correspondence with Dan P. Barag,¹³ of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, provided evidence of another four-spouted lamp from a private collection in Jerusalem. However, as with the other unpublished multiple-spouted lamps, the date and provenance are not known.

¹⁰Smith, "Household Lamps," p. 15.

¹¹Winifred Needler, *Palestine Ancient and Modern* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, 1949): 41-42.

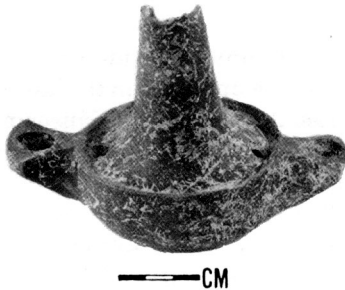
¹²*Ibid.*, Plate X.

¹³Dan P. Barag, Personal Letter.

A two-spouted lamp, with a central handle similar to the Ḥesbân E.6 lamp, is now in the Ellis Museum at the University of Missouri. Differences include lack of “bow-spouts,” and an abundance of incised decoration, which may indicate a late Roman or Byzantine date.

Since there is a dearth of information concerning lamps with multiple nozzles, a discrepancy in Smith’s accounts is puzzling and disconcerting. In an article in *Berytus* in 1963, Smith states that the unique four-spouted lamp (No. 841) was found at Ascalon and that it probably dates from the second century B.C.,¹⁴ as does the above-mentioned ring lamp now exhibited in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. However, in a later account published in *BA*, he gives a word description below the lamp’s picture and says its date is “ca. the middle of the 1st century A.D.” and it is “of unknown Palestinian provenance.”¹⁵

If the facts concerning the geographical and chronological context are confused, it would appear that there are no contextually dated predecessors for the E.6 lamp found at Ḥesbân. Also, on the basis of the Ḥesbân Early Roman evidence,¹⁶ this lamp should be assigned to the second of Smith’s dates, i.e., middle of the first century.



Double-Nozzled Herodian Lamp from Tomb E.6
Photo: Paul H. Denton

¹⁴Smith, “Development of the Lamp,” pp. 114, 95.

¹⁵Smith, “Household Lamps,” p. 14.

¹⁶Sauer, “Heshbon 1971: Area B,” pp. 63-69.